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**THESIS**

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES: CONTEXTUAL  
UNDERSTANDING OF THE EXPANDED RUSSIAN–  
VENEZUELAN RELATIONSHIP**

by

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June 2009

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EXPANDED RUSSIAN–VENEZUELAN RELATIONSHIP**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The rise to power of Vladimir Putin and Hugo Chávez in the beginning of this century was accompanied by steady commodity price increases. Both leaders benefited enormously from the increased profit produced, as the gross domestic product of both countries is closely tied to the energy market, and especially to oil. The course of the recent relationship between Russia and Venezuela is marked by a steady increase in cooperation as these two countries grow increasingly close. The relationship is touted by Russian and Venezuelan leaders as rejection of U.S. hegemony and establishment of a multipolar world through openness and international cooperation.

Thus far, U.S. reaction has focused on non-confrontationally expressing the U.S. position on specific actions of each country, while paying little attention to potential strategic aims. To date, the serious analysis has been centered on arms deals and other agreements resulting from the relationship instead of on the long-term goals of the parties involved. As Russia and Venezuela use the relationship to reject U.S. influence, achieve strategic goals, and interact internationally with other countries, however, U.S. policy decisions and international relations would be better served to acquire a deeper understanding of, and appreciation for, the relationship and its future.

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## I. INTRODUCTION TO THE RUSSIAN–VENEZUELAN RELATIONSHIP

### A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

A decade ago, when Hugo Chávez was elected President of Venezuela, relations between that country and Russia were virtually non-existent. However, over the course of the past ten years, this has changed remarkably. In 2001, these two countries signed an initial agreement to collaborate on monitoring oil prices, which included a Russian pledge to sell Venezuela arms, and a Venezuelan promise to allow Russian energy companies access to the Venezuelan energy sector.<sup>1</sup> Both countries have made good on their ends of the bargain. Since 2005, Venezuela has purchased over four billion dollars worth of military hardware in several forms, and Russian companies have begun their work in Venezuela.<sup>2</sup> This relationship has continued to expand, spilling over into many different areas. In October 2008, plans were announced for a joint venture to build a nuclear reactor in the state of Zulia in order to increase Venezuelan capacity to provide energy for its citizenry.<sup>3</sup>

The growth of the relationship caused alarm in many circles, particularly among those concerned with Chávez's clear anti-U.S. ideology.<sup>4</sup> Other analysts downplayed this fear, arguing instead that the relationship was a product of pragmatic policymakers

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1 “Russian Firms Welcome Venezuela's Debut.” FSU Energy, 18 May 2001, 1. [http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary\\_0286-31041504\\_ITM](http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-31041504_ITM) (accessed 11 November 2008).

2 Sara Miller-Llana and Fred Weir, “Russia's New Presence in Latin America,” Christian Science Monitor (online), 24 November 2008, 1. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/1125/p01s01-woam.html> (accessed 5 December 2008). See also: “Venezuela Reaffirms Future Arms Purchases from Russia.” RIA Novosti (Russian News and Information Agency), 7 November 2008. <http://en.rian.ru/world/20081107/118181084.html> (accessed 11 December 2008).

3 Russ Dallen, “Chavez Says Venezuela and Russia Will Build a Nuclear Reactor in Oil-Rich Zulia,” Latin American Herald Tribune (online), 3 December 2008, 1. <http://www.lahtright.com/article.asp?CategoryId=10717&ArticleId=320618> (accessed 3 December 2008).

4 Robert D. Peterson, “U.S. Strategy to Deal with Hugo Chavez's Establishment of Militias,” Master's Thesis, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 27 February 2008), 1-35. See also: Elisabeth Bumiller and Larry Rohter, “Bush, Replying to Chávez, Urges Latin Americans to Follow U.S.,” New York Times (online), 7 November 2005, 1-2. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F02E0DA143EF934A35752C1A9639C8B63&fta=y> (accessed 16 December 2008).

pursuing their shared economic interests.<sup>5</sup> However, the emergence of a new, potentially strategic dimension in Venezuela's relationship with Russia seems to challenge the suitability and completeness of the latter interpretation. Strategic links have begun to take shape in the form of a recent joint Russian–Venezuelan naval exercise conducted in November 2008, with air exercises planned for 2009.<sup>6</sup> Given the views of the leaders of both countries with respect to the United States, some are increasingly concerned about the quickly evolving relationship between these countries.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis seeks to understand the reasons for this increased closeness between Russia and Venezuela. More specifically, to what extent are the strategic interests of these two countries providing motivation for, and being served by, the growing relationship? Is it a relationship based upon a strategic military and governmental alliance or is it better understood through the lens of oil and military-industrial economics? What does each actor believe the relationship will produce for their side in the service and maintenance of these interests? In conjunction with this, how might these perceptions differ, and what would be the resultant potential for miscalculation?

## B. IMPORTANCE

The overall aim of this thesis is to evaluate the importance of the Russian–Venezuelan relationship and the possibility of it sponsoring a geo-strategic change in the international status quo. The goal is not to provide policy prescriptions for the countries involved, but rather to provide a clear understanding of the motivation and interaction of

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<sup>5</sup> William Ratliff, "Pragmatism over Ideology: China's Relations with Venezuela," paper presented as China Brief for Jamestown Foundation 6, no. 6 (2006): 1-3. See also: Alex Sanchez, "Memorandum to the Press: Venezuela's Security Factors and Foreign Policy Goals," Council on Hemispheric Affairs (online), 2 May 2007. <http://www.coha.org/2007/05/memorandum-to-the-press-venezuelas-security-factors-and-policy-goals/>. Also: Alex Sanchez, "Russia Returns to Latin America," Council on Hemispheric Affairs (online), 14 February 2007. <http://www.coha.org/2007/02/russia-returns-to-latin-america/> (accessed 16 December 2008).

<sup>6</sup> "Russia, Venezuela to Hold Joint Air Force Drills in 2009," RIA Novosti (Russian News and Information Agency), 31 October 2008, 1. <http://en.rian.ru/world/20081031/118054642.html> (accessed 11 November 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Rayliyaly Rivero, "A Fact of Life: Strategic Alliance for Venezuela and Russia," Council on Hemispheric Affairs (online), 23 July 2008. <http://www.coha.org/2008/07/a-fact-of-life-strategic-alliance-venezuela-and-russia/> (accessed 3 December 2008).

the primary actors. Understanding the incentives and expectations of each actor with respect to the relationship permits a more accurate analysis of the relationship's efficacy, as well as its prospective deterioration.

It is impossible to discuss the relationship between Russia and Venezuela without addressing the effect of the United States. The United States and Venezuela have historically been close, and the economic ties binding these two countries continue to remain strong. The knot in these ties has consisted mainly of oil and sales of military hardware. The United States needs the oil Venezuela can produce, and Venezuela requires assistance in extracting and refining that oil, as well military hardware and technology.<sup>8</sup> With the rise of Chávez, Venezuela has begun to seek alternatives to long-standing U.S. assistance.

The curious emergence of Russia's foreign policy involvement in the Western Hemisphere is one that is understandably unsettling for Washington. From the U.S. perspective, Russia's increased involvement in the Western Hemisphere coincides with a retreat in U.S.-Russian relations, which some argue was initiated by the U.S. refusal to extend the ABM treaty in 2003.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the Russian decision to enhance its Latin American presence corresponds with the rise of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela.<sup>10</sup> As the United States and Russia grow farther apart, Russia and Venezuela become increasingly close partners. A potential danger for the United States resulting from this partnership could be Russian support of Chávez's economic, political, and military policies centered on undermining the effect of U.S. policy and influence in its own hemisphere. Given the differing U.S. and Russian views on geopolitical events in Georgia and elsewhere, the political climate in Venezuela provides Russia an opportunity to indirectly oppose U.S. foreign policy influence without overtly taking a stand against the United States. In

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<sup>8</sup> Gawdat Bahgat, "The New Geopolitics of Oil: The United States, Saudi Arabia, and Russia," *Orbis* 47, no. 3 (2003): 447-461.

<sup>9</sup> Bernd Kubbig, "America: Escaping the Legacy of the ABM Treaty," *Contemporary Security Policy* 26, no. 3 (2005), 410-430.

<sup>10</sup> Chris Kraul and Patrick J. McDonnell, "Russia Seeking Inroads among Latin American Nations," *Los Angeles Times* (online), 27 November 2008, 1.  
<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/europe/la-fg-medvedev27-2008nov27,0,4472657.story> (accessed 11 December 2008).

addition to geopolitics, there are also more direct dangers such as Venezuela's increased militarization and its effect on the threat perception of other Latin American countries.<sup>11</sup> This thesis will explore these potential difficulties created by increased Russian involvement in Venezuela.

### C. VENEZUELAN FOREIGN POLICY: IDEOLOGY OR PRAGMATISM?

Much of the research focusing on Venezuela and Hugo Chávez contains frequent reference to the Venezuelan leader as a divisive influence in international relations.<sup>12</sup> It would indeed be difficult to oppose this particular point of view. As Michael Shifter notes, “[Chávez’s] speeches are peppered with virulent anti-U.S. rhetoric, charging Washington with imperialist designs and systematic exploitation of the poor.”<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the best example of his penchant for discordant comment occurred during Chávez’s address to the United Nation in September 2006. With metaphorical description of the U.S. President as “the Devil”, he effectively demonstrated his opposition to the U.S. administration and its associated policies toward Venezuela and Latin America as a whole.<sup>14</sup> According to Chávez himself, the ultimate goal of his administration is the complete realization of the ‘Bolívarian Revolution’ and movement away from the United States as the single hegemonic power.<sup>15</sup> The central planks of the Venezuelan administration’s foreign policy are characterized by opposition to neo-liberal economic policies, promotion of Venezuela as a regional leader, and materialization of international multi-polarity, which would serve as a check on U.S. power.<sup>16</sup>

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11 Miguel Palacio and Alexander Gabuev, "Colombia the New Venezuela," *Kommersant* (online), 27 May 2008, 1. [http://www.kommersant.com/p896309/arms\\_sales\\_Colombia/](http://www.kommersant.com/p896309/arms_sales_Colombia/) (accessed 11 December 2008).

12 Mark J. Powell, “The U.S. and Chavez: To Confront or to Contain” Master’s Thesis, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI, Joint Military Operations Dept., 2006), 1-23.

13 Michael Shifter, “In Search of Hugo Chavez,” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 3 (2006): 45-59.

14 Hugo Chávez, “Chavez Address to the United Nations,” CommonDreams.Org News Center 20, (2006): 0920-0922.

15 Richard Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution* (Verso, 2005), 1-299.

16 Harold A. Trinkunas, “Defining Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution,” *Military Review* 85, no. 4 (2005): 39.

While there is no shortage of news articles or think tank pieces documenting Venezuela's adversarial tone toward the United States, the emphasis on Chávez's anti-U.S. ideology leads to two shortcomings in the literature. First, anything Chávez does is automatically viewed as detrimental to the United States (and U.S. relationships in the region).<sup>17</sup> Overall, Chávez is perceived as a threat to American interests because of his views, but the exact nature and extent of that threat is based on conjecture rather than careful analysis. Second, the focus on ideology leads many analysts to neglect other possible motivations for Chávez's foreign policy, such as pragmatic economic gains or defensive military posturing. When these possible factors are mentioned, it is as an antidote to the overemphasis on ideology and the relevance of Chávez's worldview for foreign policy making tends to be judged as irrelevant or dismissed altogether.<sup>18</sup> In both cases, there is no systematic analysis of the relative importance of different factors in shaping various dimensions of Venezuela's foreign policy. A central purpose of this thesis is to analyze the extent to which Chávez's foreign policy is driven by ideology, economic pragmatism, security concerns or some combination thereof (in which an ideological worldview shapes Chávez's understanding of his country's economic and security interests).

A review of Chávez foreign policy points to the use of oil profits and new regional institutions as the enabling forces behind many of his aggressive attempts to establish a new regionally based political infrastructure aimed at upsetting the Latin American status quo.<sup>19</sup> The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) is one such organization intended to subvert U.S. influence in the region by offering an economic alternative to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the proposed

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17 Pascal Fletcher, "Kerry Attacks Venezuela's Chavez," Global Exchange (online), 22 March 2004, 1. <http://www.globalexchange.org/countries/americas/venezuela/1683.html> (accessed 16 December 2008).

18 Sanchez, Memorandum to the Press: Venezuela's Security Factors and Foreign Policy Goals. <http://www.coha.org/2007/05/memorandum-to-the-press-venezuelas-security-factors-and-policy-goals/>. See also: Alex Sanchez, "Venezuela's Military in the Hugo Chávez Era," Council on Hemispheric Affairs (online), 18 September 2008. <http://www.coha.org/2008/09/venezuelaâ™s-military-in-the-hugo-chavez-era/> (accessed 16 December 2008).

19 Genaro Arriagada, "Petropolitics in Latin America: A Review of Energy Policy and Regional Relations," working paper for Andean Working Group of Inter-American Dialogue, no. 12 (2006): 3-22.

Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).<sup>20</sup> In addition to offering alternative institutions, Chávez has used profits from Venezuelan commodities to garner support for a broad left-wing movement in Latin America. Electoral successes of Chávez allies have been noted in several Latin American elections, including Evo Morales in Bolivia and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua.<sup>21</sup> Two other leftist candidates, Peru's Ollanta Humala and Mexico's Manuel Lopez-Obrador, narrowly missed victory at the polls, as well.<sup>22</sup> The image of Chávez and his ardent support for favored candidates played a large role in these elections, whether positive or negative. Oil money may have also found its way into the coffers of the Forces for the Armed Revolution of Colombia, or FARC. In spring of 2008, following a Colombian raid on the FARC across their border with Ecuador, Colombia claimed to have discovered computer evidence of promises of large-scale Venezuelan monetary support for the FARC rebels.<sup>23</sup>

There is little doubt that oil prices have enabled Chávez to execute a far more aggressive foreign policy than would ever have been possible previously. Clearly, the influence wielded by both Russia and Venezuela in the energy sector is formidable, and neither country hides the fact that energy policy is the mechanism for providing economic security and expanding political clout on the international stage.<sup>24</sup> Under Chávez, Venezuela has set out to directly follow this path.<sup>25</sup> It has formed PetroCaribe, a regional arrangement, which allows Caribbean purchasers of Venezuelan oil to pay off half of the current oil price within 25 years using cash or alternative products (e.g., sugar,

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20 Gregory Albo, "The Unexpected Revolution: Venezuela Confronts Neoliberalism," paper presented as part of International Development Week at University of Alberta from York University Department of Political Science, Alberta, Canada, January 2006, 1-14.

21 Jorge G. Castaneda, "Latin America's Left Turn," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 3 (2006), 28-43. See also: John Hammond, "Latin America: A Resurgent Left?" *New Politics* 11, no. 4 (2008), 40.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Juan Forero, "FARC Computer Files are Authentic, Interpol Probe Finds," *Washington Post* (online), 15 May 2008. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/15/AR2008051504153.html> (accessed 12 December 2008).

24 A. Cohen, "The National Security Consequences of Oil Dependency," Heritage Foundation Lecture# 1021 (2007). See also: Russia: Ukraine, Europe and the Natural Gas Cutoff, 2008.

25 Cohen, The National Security Consequences of Oil Dependency. See also: H. Yanes, "The Cuba-Venezuela Alliance: 'Emancipatory Neo-Bolivarismo' or Totalitarian Expansion?" Institute for Cuban & Cuban-American Studies Occasional Paper Series, University of Miami, (2005).

bananas, rice).<sup>26</sup> PetroSur is another agreement between Venezuela and several other South American nations, such as Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil, to promote cooperation between state-run oil companies.<sup>27</sup> Venezuelan entry into Mercosur, ALBA (as mentioned earlier), and several other efforts by Chávez are also aimed at increasing Venezuelan political and economic influence through effective utilization of oil production and selective distribution.<sup>28</sup>

Aggressive policy efforts are also associated with more aggressive costs, and it is this particular facet that encourages researchers to conclude that Chávez's policies and the economics behind them are simply not sustainable.<sup>29</sup> As oil goes, so goes Venezuelan international ability. This raises a series of questions. Will ideology figure as prominently in Chávez's foreign policy once resources run short? Will relationships forged by Chávez turn out to be merely fleeting encounters that evaporate as soon as the oil money lubricant is gone? This question is one that should be asked about Russia, as well, in lieu of a recent drop in oil prices.<sup>30</sup> In the case of the Russian–Venezuelan relationship, the general opinion is that a decrease in oil prices will undercut Venezuelan ability to purchase Russian arms and offer attractive oil development contracts to Russian companies.<sup>31</sup> Such a scenario would certainly test the bond of ideology as the substance giving life to the Russian–Venezuelan relationship. If the relationship is strategic, or if the two countries share an ideology, one might expect to see a greater resolve from both

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26 S. Ellner, "Toward a 'Multipolar World': Using Oil Diplomacy to Sever Venezuela's Dependence," NACLA Report on the Americas, (September–October 2007), 15-43.

27 Ibid. See also: J. A. Cirino, "Latin America 'Populism for the XXI Century,'" gwu.edu (online), Fall 2006, 1-22. [http://www.gwu.edu/~clai/recent\\_events/2006/060921-NeoPopulism\\_Cirino\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.gwu.edu/~clai/recent_events/2006/060921-NeoPopulism_Cirino_Paper.pdf) (accessed 20 January 2009).

28 Ibid.

29 Mark Weisbrot and Lewis Sandoval, "Update: The Venezuela Economy in the Chávez Years," special report for Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), February 2008, 5-23.

30 Christian Schmollinger and Grant Smith, "Crude Oil Futures Drop After U.S. Senate Rejects Auto Bailout," Bloomberg (Online), 12 December 2008, 1. <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601091&sid=aWtLCDffqFYY&refer=india> (accessed 12 December 2008).

31 Kurt Weyland, "Will Chavez Lose His Luster?" Foreign Affairs 80, no. 6 (2001), 73-87. See also: Shifter, *In Search of Hugo Chavez*.

sides trump temporal fluctuations of price. If the relationship is primarily business, low prices could seemingly lead to distancing between the countries. Some contend that high oil prices may be necessary for Chávez to maintain his power within Venezuela.<sup>32</sup>

#### **D. RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND RUSSIAN-VENEZUELAN RELATIONS**

Russia has long held a prominent place in the hearts and minds of scholars primarily as a result of its position as a world superpower for many years. There are two main thoughts that seek to explain post Cold War Russian behavior. Some argue that the paradigm best illuminating the logic for Russian action is one that assumes Russia is intent on resuming its role as a major power, regardless of the potential international friction this might cause. According to an article produced by the Heritage Foundation, the Russian government holds the view that U.S. hegemony and the “unipolar world order it allegedly promotes” are a “major threat to the Russian state.”<sup>33</sup> If this is the case, Medvedev and Chávez share a common, ideologically driven view of the United States, one that sees U.S. hegemony as a threat to the democratization of relations between states. In contrast, Dmitry Trenin contends that Russia’s foreign policy and international relations are best explained by its exclusive desire for economic accumulation.<sup>34</sup> Again, both perspectives (ideology and economics) are useful in explaining Russian foreign policy actions, and, just as in the case of Venezuela, the difficulty lies in determining how important each is in the decision to pursue a specific policy objective or alliance.

A complementary, although somewhat psychological, aspect of Russian decision making has been presented by Kathleen Hancock. She has noted that Russia’s perception of itself as a unique regional superpower with a storied history and a wealth of natural resources is not well supported by its relatively weak economic foundation.<sup>35</sup> Her effort

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32 Weyland, Will Chavez Lose His Luster?

33 Steven Johnson, Ariel Cohen, and William L. T. Schirano, “Countering Hugo Chávez’s Anti-U.S. Arms Alliance,” Heritage Foundation Executive Memorandum 1010, (2006):1-3.

34 Dmitri Trenin, “Russia Redefines Itself and Its Relations with the West,” The Washington Quarterly 30, no. 2 (2007): 95-106.

35 Kathleen J. Hancock, “Russia: Great Power Image Versus Economic Reality,” Asian Perspective 31, no. 4 (2007): 71-98.

is effective at outlining the Russian administration's psychology used to make decisions on the international stage. In a similar light, students of Venezuela experience a dilemma in that scholarly concentration is placed on the regime's ideology. The practical, sensible justification for policy remains out of focus, eclipsed by the more sensational element—the often flamboyant fashion in which Chávez announces and articulates the policy in question. In both cases, it is easy to become disillusioned with Russian and Venezuelan self-perception and to allow it to become an impediment to understanding. Indeed, a central area of research, which this thesis seeks to advance, is how self-perception affects the foreign policy calculus of both Russia and Venezuela.

A notable deficiency in literature covering Russian foreign policy is the failure to address the particular interactions between Russia and other states since the demise of the Soviet Union. To date, there has been little examination and measurement of the relationships into which Russia has entered under Putin, and now under Medvedev. These contemporary relationships are charting the course for an entirely new Russia, a Russia that has emerged more powerful than ever before, and yet there is little attention paid to how Russia has wielded that increased power and for what reasons. Multiple decisions by Russia to cut the flow of natural gas into several countries during the middle of a very cold winter in order to force payment and improve Russian negotiating position have not gone unnoticed, but the significance of these actions has been largely ignored by the international community.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Amy Jaffe and Robert Manning, "Russia, Energy and the West," *Survival* 43, no. 2 (2001), 133-152. See also: Chloe Bruce, "Fraternal Friction Or Fraternal Fiction?: The Gas Factor in Russian-Belarusian Relations," report from Oxford Institute for Energy Studies NG8, March 2005, 2-20.

While more coercive than the petrol politics of Venezuela<sup>37</sup>, the effect has been successful for Russian foreign policy and Russia continually resorts to this same tactic, most recently during the winter of 2008–2009.<sup>38</sup> Without a doubt, energy has been the catalyst that has propelled Russian economic and political growth, and Russia has worked hard to expand its control over energy resources heading to the European Union and elsewhere. Events in Georgia in 2008 seemingly took the United States and other countries by surprise, in spite of the fact that Russia has maintained and repeatedly used troops in that country since the very beginning of its transition to democracy in 1993.<sup>39</sup> The original decision to deploy Iskander missiles in response to the U.S. missile shield in Poland, although recently reversed, provides further amplification of the character of Russian foreign policy.<sup>40</sup> In a crude comparison with Venezuela, although both utilize energy to achieve policy goals, Russia uses energy as a stick, while Chávez offers it as a carrot. Complete control over energy policy by a highly centralized government enjoying concentrated political-economic power offers a very effective tool by which foreign policy goals can be obtained.<sup>41</sup> This small amount of knowledge regarding foreign policy tools of both countries, while somewhat insightful, cannot easily be applied to produce a direct understanding of the Russian–Venezuelan relationship.

Given the newness of Russian–Venezuelan relations, relatively little scholarship has been devoted specifically to understanding this budding alliance. The few analyses that exist attempt to ascertain and describe the motivation for maintaining the

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<sup>37</sup> For discussion of Venezuelan oil politics see: Genaro A. Herrera, "Petróleo y Gas En América Latina. Un Análisis Político y De Relaciones Internacionales a Partir De La Política Venezolana," Documento De Trabajo (DT) 19, no. 9 (2006). See also: Arriagada, *Petropolitics in Latin America: A Review of Energy Policy and Regional Relations*. Also: Thomas Friedman, "The First Law of Petropolitics." *Ecologist-London* and *Wadebridge then Slinfold then London* 36, no. 6 (2006), 24.

<sup>38</sup> "Russia: Ukraine, Europe and the Natural Gas Cutoff," Stratfor (online), 4 December 2008, 1. [http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20081204\\_russia\\_ukraine\\_europe\\_and\\_natural\\_gas\\_cutoff?ip\\_auth\\_redir ect=1](http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20081204_russia_ukraine_europe_and_natural_gas_cutoff?ip_auth_redir ect=1) (accessed 12 December 2008).

<sup>39</sup> Paul Kubicek, "Russian Foreign Policy and the West," *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 4 (1999), 547-568.

<sup>40</sup> Tony Halpin, "President Dmitri Medvedev Orders Missiles Deployed in Europe as World Hails Obama," *Times Online* (online), 6 November 2008, 1. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article5090077.ece> (accessed 17 November 2008).

<sup>41</sup> A. Zhuplev, "Economic Internationalization of Russia: Roots, Trends, and Scenarios," *International Political Science Review/ Revue Internationale De Science Politique* 29, no. 1 (2008), 99.

relationship, but fail to explain conditions for either potential growth or termination.<sup>42</sup> The one exception is a short article written by Mark Katz in 2006 that evaluates the working dynamics of the relationship as a basis for discussing possible scenarios for both the growth and demise of the relationship.<sup>43</sup> This thesis expands upon the argument advanced by Katz by providing a more in-depth examination of the relationship between Russia and Venezuela and an updated vision that seeks to understand the strategic significance, if any, of the relationship's continued development over the past few years. The thesis will analyze the significance of these events for the relationship's growth or dissolution as well.

Finally, the recent decline in oil prices raises important new questions about the future of the Russian–Venezuelan relationship. The arrival of a commodity boom generating high oil prices satisfied conditions necessary for each of these two countries to dabble in previously unexplored international realms.<sup>44</sup> Given the centrality of oil and energy to the foreign policy efforts of Russia and Venezuela, the thesis will examine the extent to which a decline in oil prices has led (and is likely to lead in the future) to a review and potential reordering of priorities that will affect the economic, ideological and strategic components of the bilateral relationship.

## **E. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES**

The recent warmth between Venezuela and Russia cannot find a logical explanatory basis in historic or geographic factors. The two countries not natural geographic partners in trade, nor have they enjoyed benefits of a long-standing bilateral relationship. The arrangements and agreements forged by these two countries over the

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Hakim, “Is Washington Losing Latin America?” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 1 (January/February 2006), 39-53. <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20060101faessay85105/peter-hakim/is-washington-losing-latin-america.htmlmode%3Dprint> (accessed 3 February, 2008). See also: “Venezuela Under Chávez,” *Strategic Comments* (online) 11, no. 2 (2005), 1-2. Also: S. Ellner, Toward a ‘Multipolar World’: Using Oil Diplomacy to Sever Venezuela’s Dependence.

<sup>43</sup> Mark N. Katz, “The Putin-Chávez Partnership,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 53, no. 4 (2006): 3-9.

<sup>44</sup> Matthew Burrows, and Gregory F. Treverton. “A Strategic View of Energy Futures,” *Survival* 49, no. 3 (2007): 79-90. See also: Weyland, Will Chavez Lose His Luster? See also: Shifter, In Search of Hugo Chavez.

past seven years are new, unique, and unprecedented. The newness of the relationship and the relative lack of familiarity of the partners create the potential for misperception of the other's commitment to, and stake in, the relationship. Unlike more formal alliances (e.g., NATO), there is no singular unifying effort or explicit ideology providing permanent context for the relationship. The result is a blurred comprehension of what this increasingly close arrangement between Russia and Venezuela implies. This degraded insight hampers effectiveness of foreign policy by introducing conjecture, assumption, and unknown variables into its construction.

Clearly, there would be no relationship between Russia and Venezuela if both parties did not stand to benefit significantly. This thesis will detail the economic, political, and military interaction between Russia and Venezuela, assessing likely benefits and results for each. At first glance, actions of these governments are most clearly understood when examined through the lens of neo-realism and its associated balance of power theories, both of which are derived from international relations theory.<sup>45</sup>

Kenneth Waltz would likely argue that the actions of Russia and Venezuela serve to act as balancing behavior in the face of U.S. hegemony. This idea is directly in line with his balance of power theory, which assumes that less powerful states will attempt to find a counterweight to the power of a very strong state.<sup>46</sup> If the words and behavior of Chávez genuinely reflect his estimation of the United States, he perceives the United States as a threat with which Venezuela (and virtually every other similar country) is in competition.<sup>47</sup> A gain in security for Venezuela is tantamount to a loss for the United States. It would seem that the Chávez administration views its relationship with the United States from a realist perspective. Given the original Russian reaction (announced deployment of missiles) to the American decision to deploy a missile shield in Europe (presumably a security gain for the United States and its allies), Russia is also operating from a realist standpoint with respect to its interaction with the United States.

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45 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (McGraw-Hill, 1979).

46 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

47 Brian Ellsworth, "Chavez Says Colombia and U.S. Plotting Invasion," *International Herald Tribune* (online), 26 January 2008. <http://www.iht.com/articles/reuters/2008/01/26/america/OUKWD-UK-VENEZUELA-COLOMBIA.php> (accessed 19 November 2008).

In contrast, a liberal institutionalist approach would probably counter that the behavior expressed is not derived from fear of a hegemonic power, but rather from the potential benefit to be gained from cooperation between Russia and Venezuela.<sup>48</sup> From this perspective, absolute economic gains rather than relative security gains motivate the relationship.<sup>49</sup> This approach also has *prima facie* plausibility and its relevance as an explanation for different dimensions of the Russian–Venezuelan relationship will be examined in the thesis.

Finally, a constructivist approach would stress the degree to which the relevance of economic and security issues for foreign policy, as well as views on absolute or relative gains, are shaped by the worldviews and perceptions of leaders and societies.<sup>50</sup> From this perspective, it is important not only to examine how Chávez and Putin’s worldviews shape particular foreign policy decisions, but also to understand how evolving perceptions of one another have shaped the relationship. As Katz mentioned in his article, Russia was initially cautious going into the relationship with Venezuela, but for unspecified reasons this seems to have waned and a strategic component was added to the relationship.<sup>51</sup> By evaluating how interaction affects perception, and how perception is likely to affect future interaction, new and different insights are possible.<sup>52</sup>

As the preceding example suggests, it is essential to evaluate the evolution of the Russian–Venezuelan relationship to understand its true scope. A simple snapshot of the economic or security interests served by the alliance at any point in time, is inadequate for revealing the factors motivating each of the partners in the relationship. One key

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48 Robert Keohane and R. Owen, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

49 Humberto Marquez, “Venezuela-Russia: Business Deals Consolidate Alliance,” Inter Press Service News Agency (online), 13 November 2008. <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=44687> (accessed 17 November 2008).

50 David L. Rousseau, *Identifying Threats and Threatening Identities: The Social Construction of Realism and Liberalism* (Stanford University Press, 2006). See also: Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Cornell University Press, 1996). Also: Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is what States make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *Theory and Structure in International Political Economy: An International Organization Reader* 46, no. 2 (1999), 391-425.

51 Katz, *The Putin-Chávez Partnership*.

52 Rousseau, *Identifying Threats and Threatening Identities: The Social Construction of Realism and Liberalism*.

question related to the evolution of the relationship is the extent to which it has been shaped by U.S. foreign policy actions and evolving Russian and Venezuelan perceptions of the threat posed by the United States. Did the U.S. refusal to supply the Chávez administration with military hardware drive Venezuela into Russian arms? On the other side, did U.S. renunciation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) in 2002 affect Russia's perspective and lead to its withdrawal from the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty (CFE) and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty II (START II)?<sup>53</sup> If so, this would serve as an example for how the interplay between Russia and the United States influenced a less cooperative Russian stance (similar to Venezuela) and led to a common operating platform for Chávez and Putin. Recent interaction between the United States and Russia<sup>54</sup> provides ample material for a discussion on whether or not each action is predicated upon the previous action of the other, resulting in a series of tit for tat actions, which drive the two countries farther apart (and Russia and Venezuela closer together).

## F. METHODS AND SOURCES

Methodologically, this thesis will focus on the goals of Russia and Venezuela and their perception of how the alliance serves their foreign policy goals. Final analysis will evaluate the effectiveness of the recent arrangement and explore the prospects for miscalculations in foreign policy emerging from differences in perception. The timeframe explored travels back nine years to guarantee inclusion of the relationship's origins. Given Chávez's ascent to power in 1998 and Russia's tremendous economic struggle in the late 1990s, this is the timeframe best suited for an examination of the changes in both countries that cultivated the existing relationship.

In discerning the overall strategy for Russia and Venezuela, it is best to begin with the most obvious sources. Examination of statements, interviews, and speeches of the Presidents and other government leaders yield a good deal of information regarding

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53 Harald Muller, "The Future of Nuclear Weapons in an Interdependent World," *The Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2007), 63-75.

54 'Interaction' refers to discussion over the proposed missile shield in Poland and the Russian response mentioned earlier. See: Halpin, President Dmitri Medvedev Orders Missiles Deployed in Europe as World Hails Obama.

the goals for each administration. While this may appear a painfully obvious technique loaded with material designed for consumption, there are several examples of situations in which countries have, either directly or indirectly, announced their intentions and goals, only to be ignored or overlooked by the target governments, as the announced strategy seemed impractical or illogical. U.S. disregard for North Korea's goal of ending U.S. ship-borne electronic surveillance of its territory in 1968 serves as one such example<sup>55</sup>, as does the trivialization of the goals of Al Qaeda prior to 11 September 2001 by U.S. leadership. In sum, the best source for determining the underlying goal of an organization or government can be found in the scrutiny of their words and actions. It is also important to examine how these words and actions are interpreted by the partner in an alliance.

Toward this end, sources derived from both the Venezuelan and Russian Ministries of Foreign Affairs will be utilized to provide further information concerning agreements and arrangements, in addition to the unique perception of each actor. The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) and records of Congressional testimony will be utilized to document interaction of the actors, and also to provide U.S. governmental perception. In addition, the scholarly material utilized will be drawn from English, Spanish, and Russian language sources in order to properly understand each side of the arrangement. This also serves to protect the thesis from exposure to mirror imaging or miscommunication that occasionally occurs in sources that, although derived from one language, attempt to cover two actors that utilize two different languages.

## **G. THESIS OVERVIEW**

Chapter II of the thesis details the relationship between Russia and Venezuela and its gradual evolution over the course of the past nine years. The role of oil economics, military sales, and the question of a strategic alliance figures prominently in this chapter, as these are defining characteristics in the relationship's development. Chapter III examines the way in which the realist and liberal paradigms of international relations

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<sup>55</sup> James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy, 1919-1991; Political Applications of Limited Naval Force* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 3rd ed., 1994).

theory analyze the relationship and argues that a constructivist “perceptions” paradigm is needed. The final section of the chapter evaluates Russian and Venezuelan actions and perceptions (historic and current) in order to explain Russian and Venezuelan world views and their importance in the decision making process. Chapter IV evaluates the role of the United States in the formation of Russian and Venezuelan policy, the strategic implications of the Russian–Venezuelan relationship, and its likely evolution.

## **II. THE EVOLUTION OF THE RUSSIAN/VENEZUELAN RELATIONSHIP**

Although the relationship between Russia and Venezuela has only existed for a short time, its accelerated growth can be explained by mutual understanding derived through very similar recent experiences. Both countries experienced economic hardships that gave way to political change and ultimately to a new national direction. The common understanding produced by the recent history of both countries led them to abandon foreign-sponsored policies in favor of independent paths, ultimately bringing them together as partners in a relationship. This relationship continues to readily generate energy and military arms sale agreements that benefit both parties. More intriguing, however, is the claim by both sides that theirs is a strategic relationship. Before the question of whether or not the relationship is as strategic as claimed can be answered, however, close examination of the recent history of both parties is necessary in order to properly establish a baseline for the relationship.

### **A. FORMATIVE HISTORY OF RUSSIA AND VENEZUELA**

The decisions of both Russia and Venezuela to enter into mutually cooperative agreements are better understood with fuller knowledge of internal changes, which have occurred in these countries over the past 15 years. Both countries have experienced dramatic change in many ways, but in other aspects remain the same. By reviewing the recent experiences of each country, it is possible to discern the conditions and context that have produced a mutual attraction between Russia and Venezuela. The failure of IMF policies (backed by Washington) to correct poor economic conditions in both countries and the prominence of U.S. influence in international affairs collectively sparked and fueled anti-Western, particularly anti-U.S., attitudes. The success experienced by Russia and Venezuela after turning away from U.S.-backed policies, whether coincidental to high oil prices or not, generated a mutually accepted and

mutually attractive conventional wisdom that the best course is to oppose U.S. influence and policies. The similar experiences in both countries established a common framework for policy that remains inherently opposed to U.S. foreign policy.

### **1. Russia's Post-transition Trauma and Attitudes toward the West**

Perhaps the most recognizable dramatic change of the twentieth century occurred in Eastern Europe as the former Soviet Union dissolved and gave rise to democratically oriented governments. As the largest and most populous former member of the Soviet Union, Russia was a leader in implementing political change. The political transition that spurred structural change inside the government of this country was extremely abrupt. This change that effectively ended the long-running Cold War was welcomed by NATO governments, as well as by those countries that had been subject to the yoke of communism for over 50 years.

While certainly perceived as a positive development both for international relations and domestic considerations, the changes inherent to Russia's transition exacted a considerable toll on the Russian economy and in the everyday lives of Russian citizens. As the economy also transitioned from a command economy to a free-market system, inflation spiked and it became virtually impossible for the average Russian to purchase even the most basic items. In Russia's first year removed from communism and a controlled economy, the gross domestic product slipped over 14 percent and prices rose by 1,735 percent.<sup>56</sup> Inflation continued at over 800 percent annually until improvement was finally made in 1997.

The international community, aware of the acute needs of Russia and its citizenry, moved to improve the precarious situation of the simultaneous Russian transition to democracy and free markets. Monetary assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was granted to assist Russia through this difficult period, thanks primarily to the United States and President Bill Clinton. Unfortunately, it did little to improve the lives of Russian citizens, and many believed they were better off in the days of communism

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56 Hancock, Russia: Great Power Image Versus Economic Reality.

than in the first five years of the new democratic and capitalist system. In fact, the ineffectual results led to backlash against IMF policies, those who had supported their implementation, and the West, in general.<sup>57</sup>

Hindsight provides strong indication that the IMF policies implemented were not very well suited to Russia's unique situation.<sup>58</sup> These reforms were so painful for the people of Russia in the short term some speculate they could not possibly have been introduced democratically.<sup>59</sup> The outcome of the initial years of transition, dubbed a "virtual economy" by some, produced tremendous wealth for a very few and extreme difficulty for the rest.<sup>60</sup> As capitalism took hold, Russia was forced to deal with versions of crime, corruption, and incompetence, which it had never before experienced.<sup>61</sup> The learning curve proved extremely steep. The failure of Washington-led IMF policies initiated by President Boris Yeltsin's administration began to generate dissatisfaction with the West and with Yeltsin, as Russians "saw a causal connection between Western institutions and economic and regional disintegration" just as they had with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1992.<sup>62</sup>

The salvation for the Russian economy manifested itself in the form of increased energy prices, elimination of the "oligarchs," and fiscal policy implemented by President Vladimir Putin upon succeeding Yeltsin in 2000.<sup>63</sup> The economic situation and quality of life for Russians continued to improve as energy prices steadily climbed throughout President Putin's time in office providing higher levels of income. This relatively prosperous period observed a Russian effort to turn away from IMF policies espoused by the West and forge a new path. The success of the effort, while often criticized for being significantly predicated upon commodity prices, has produced stability and led to far

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57 Hancock, *Russia: Great Power Image Versus Economic Reality*.

58 D. K. Simes, "Losing Russia," *Foreign Affairs New York* 86, no. 6 (2007), 36.

59 *Ibid.*

60 C. G. Gaddy and B. W. Ickes, "Russia's Virtual Economy," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 5 (1998), 53-67.

61 *Ibid.*

62 Hancock, *Russia: Great Power Image Versus Economic Reality*.

63 Simes, *Losing Russia*.

better conditions for the Russian people than those experienced during the first days of the political and economic transition. More importantly, this success inculcated a sense of Russian pride and correctness of action in spite of decreased political freedom and a trend toward political authoritarianism throughout this period.<sup>64</sup> In 2000, the common Russian perception was that U.S.–backed assistance led to extremely difficult conditions for Russians and it wasn’t until Russia went its own way that things began to improve.<sup>65</sup>

## **2. Venezuela’s Political Change and Resource–based Economy**

Prior to the initiation of democracy in 1958, Venezuela had experienced its share of dictatorial rule and governmental chaos. Consolidation of President Rómulo Ernesto Betancourt’s efforts occurred in the form of a Constitution drafted just three years later in 1961.<sup>66</sup> By and large, the democracy established in Venezuela enjoyed a relatively steady level of support until the late 1980s and early 1990s. During this period, Venezuela faced tremendous economic difficulty associated with declining oil prices, as the country’s economy was (and remains) dependent upon petroleum. In response to the problem, President Carlos Pérez in 1989 sought to institute austere IMF policies to arrest the economic slide.<sup>67</sup> The conflict created over the implementation of these policies resulted in riots, street violence, and several hundred Venezuelans killed.

In February 1992, a Venezuelan Army officer, Hugo Chávez, led an unsuccessful coup attempt against President Carlos Pérez. While the coup attempt ended in defeat and imprisonment for Chávez, it also thrust him into the Venezuelan national spotlight. Chávez and MBR 200 (his eventual political party) began to be viewed as champions of equality who were willing to confront an inept government that was incapable of solving the problems confronted by the majority of Venezuelans. Chávez’s appearance on television in an effort to convince other coup participants to discontinue their efforts put a

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64 Zhuplev, Economic Internationalization of Russia: Roots, Trends, and Scenarios.

65 M. McFaul and K. Stoner-Weiss, "The Myth of the Authoritarian Model," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 1 (2008), 68-84.

66 K. A. Peterson, "Implications of China's Growing Demand for Oil: A Case Study in Venezuela," Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School (2007).

67 A. Valenzuela, "Latin American Presidencies Interrupted," *Journal of Democracy* 15 (2004), 5-19.

face together with a name of someone who was willing to take a stand in support of workers and the poor. As time passed, he began to be viewed by the overwhelming majority as a defender of the common man instead of a traitor.<sup>68</sup>

In December 1993, Pérez was impeached and replaced by President Rafael Caldera. President Caldera's term featured a banking crisis, more declining oil prices, and eventually a painful recession in 1998. The decade-long economic stagnation in Venezuela together with a high level of inequality provided opportunity for Chávez and his party in 1998. In that year, the man who had been convicted of attempting to overturn the Venezuelan government was popularly elected to lead it. Sensing the mood of the populace and understanding the pivotal nature of the opportunity presented, Chávez immediately used his support to dramatically and fundamentally change the Venezuelan government. Within one year of his election, Chávez introduced referenda to create a constituent assembly, craft an entirely new Constitution, and have it approved. All were passed, and Chávez successfully managed to change many key balancing features of the Venezuelan political system in just one year.<sup>69</sup>

The same stimulus that provided Russia with a way out of economic despair in the very late 1990s and early 2000s also brought improvement to Venezuela. The first four years of the Chávez presidency were politically unstable and economically costly, as evidenced by the attempted military coup in April 2002 and the oil strike in 2003.<sup>70</sup> However, the gradual, steady increase in energy prices provided a significant boost to the Venezuelan economy and to Chávez's political capital. The real (inflation-adjusted) gross domestic product of Venezuela increased over 87 percent from the second quarter of 2003 to February 2008, and the Venezuelan economy grew in 2006 and 2007 by 10.3 and 8.4 percent, respectively.<sup>71</sup> Whether attributable to Chávez and his policies or high oil prices, the Venezuelan economy has improved while he has been the head of

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68 This essence of this view is characterized in: Gott, Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution.

69 A brief summary of Venezuelan political history as contained in: J. C. Frederick, *The History of Venezuela* (Greenwood Press, 2005).

70 Weisbrot and Sandoval, Update: The Venezuela Economy in the Chávez Years.

71 Ibid.

government. The fact is that Chávez enjoys relatively decent approval ratings and he has already won reelection once. His latest and most dramatic success was to remove term limits so that he will be eligible to run again in the 2012 Presidential election and beyond.<sup>72</sup>

The Venezuelan experience is not dissimilar to that of Russia at the end of the 1990s. Both countries turned away from IMF-sponsored policies and relied upon a different direction for necessary improvement. In so doing, the relative success of both countries created the conception that success could be obtained by turning away from U.S.-backed policies and pursuing other options. In both the Russian and Venezuelan case, improvement was not forthcoming until after each country abandoned U.S.-supported IMF policies. The actual reasons for improvement are far more complex, but the common perception, one that is utilized rather frequently by Chávez, is that the interests of countries are best served by avoiding political or economic entanglement with the United States and by working toward a multipolar world. Frankly put, thwarting U.S. influence and working to subvert U.S. policy is perceived by the leaders of both governments (and large sectors of the population who voted to elect those leaders) to be positive both domestically and for the international community.

## **B. COMPONENTS OF THE RUSSIAN–VENEZUELAN RELATIONSHIP**

Joint agreements on weapons sales and energy agreements are the bedrock of the relationship between Russia and Venezuela. These agreements have been present from the very beginning of the relationship, and they remain the focal point of efforts from both sides. While other forms of interaction are also present in the relationship, most notably joint military exercises and technical exchange, energy and arms represent the lion's share of the effort, thus far. These efforts toward joint military exercises and military-technical exchange, both very recent additions to the relationship, presumably are demonstrative manifestations of the emerging strategic aspect discussed in the following section.

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72 T. Padgett, "Hugo Chavez for President ... Now and Forever?" Time (Online), 02 December 2008, 1. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1863197,00.html> (accessed 26 January 2009).

## **1. Military Hardware/Technical Support**

Venezuelan purchases of Russian military equipment represent the most extensive dimension of the Russian–Venezuelan relationship. The embryonic stages of the relationship began with the first visit of President Hugo Chávez to Moscow in May 2001, during which a framework was agreed upon by which Russia would sell Venezuela military hardware.<sup>73</sup> After a second visit by Chávez to the Kremlin in October of the same year, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov returned the favor in December and announced Russia’s obligation to expand the market for its weapons by “tapping further into new countries.”<sup>74</sup> While the initial May agreement and the announcement from Kasyanov were nonspecific, they laid the groundwork for eventual delivery of significant amounts of Russian weaponry to Venezuela. These initial overtures did not bear fruit for several years, in spite of the proclaimed mutual desire for cooperation.

The first concrete deal transacted between the two countries was formalized in early 2005 on the heels of a Chávez visit in November 2004 to Moscow and included the purchase of 100,000 AK–103 assault rifles, ammunition, and other light weaponry at a total of 54 million dollars.<sup>75</sup> This agreement was carried out in spite of U.S. concerns that the number of weapons purchased exceeded the size of the Venezuelan Army, which numbered approximately 34,000 active personnel when the agreement was formalized.<sup>76</sup> On 3 April 2005, President Hugo Chávez announced plans to expand the Venezuelan reserve force created in 2004 from 80,000 personnel to 2.3 million volunteers, which would seemingly provide more than enough personnel for each rifle purchased.<sup>77</sup> U.S. representatives were also worried that these weapons might end up in the hands of the

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73 Katz, The Putin-Chávez Partnership.

74 L. Pronina, "Arms Producers Take Aim at Wider Clientele," The Moscow Times (Online), 19 December 2001. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P1-49052002.html> (accessed 15 January 2009).

75 "U.S. Skeptical of Arms Deal with Russians," Washington Times (Online), 23 May 2005, 1. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/may/23/20050523-103116-5028r/> (accessed 15 January 2009).

76 C. Chivers, "Chávez's Bid for Russian Arms Pains U.S.," New York Times (Online), 16 August 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/16/world/europe/16russia.html> (accessed 15 January 2009).

77 "Venezuela: Arms Deals, Big and Small," Stratfor, 06 April 2005. [http://www.stratfor.com/venezuela\\_arms\\_deals\\_big\\_and\\_small?ip\\_auth\\_redirect=1](http://www.stratfor.com/venezuela_arms_deals_big_and_small?ip_auth_redirect=1) (accessed 15 January 2009).

Forces for Armed Revolution of Colombia (FARC).<sup>78</sup> Given the supposed documentation of a Chávez connection to the FARC on a recovered laptop computer, in hindsight this particular concern does not want for credible basis.<sup>79</sup>

2006 saw Venezuela continuing to ramp up its purchases of Russian military gear, helping the Kremlin achieve what turned out to be its most successful year on the arms market.<sup>80</sup> With total international arms sales of over 14 billion dollars in 2006, Russia doubled its previous record of 6 billion dollars set in 2004. The Russian backlog of orders surpassed 30 billion dollars, which doubled the backlog from 2005.<sup>81</sup> Venezuela's portion of this Russian success included SU-30s, transport and attack helicopters, assault rifles, and construction of factories designed to produce ammunition for assault rifles.<sup>82</sup> While some of these agreements had been initiated during 2005, Venezuelan purchases of Russian military equipment accelerated through 2006 in tandem with a 33 percent rise in the defense budget to 2.08 billion dollars. During the two year period of 2005–2006, Venezuela signed contracts with Russia to purchase weapons and other equipment that totaled around 1.5 billion dollars. Both countries also participated in discussions concerning "SU-39 strike aircraft and Amur-class submarines, as well as air defense missile systems and infantry fighting vehicles."<sup>83</sup>

It was in 2006 that the United States banned further sales of military weapons systems to Venezuela.<sup>84</sup> Prior to this ban, the United States had engaged other countries to convince them to discontinue business with Venezuela where arms sales were

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78 Chávez's Bid for Russian Arms Pains U.S.

79 "Chavez Agreed to Arm Rebels, Files Indicate," Washington Times (Online), 10 May 2008, 1. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/may/10/chavez-agreed-to-armrebels-files-indicate/?page=2> (accessed 15 January 2009).

80 Makienko, K., Vassiliev, D., "Russia on the Arms Market in 2006," Moscow Defense Brief 1, no. 7, (2007). <http://mdb.cast.ru/mdb/2-2007/item3/item1/> (accessed 15 January 2009).

81 Ibid.

82 Makienko, K., Vassiliev, D., "The Venezuela Contracts," Moscow Defense Brief 1, no. 7 (2007).

83 Specific Venezuelan military purchase figures derived from: "Caribbean and Latin America," The Military Balance 108, no. 1 (2008): 55-100. <http://www.iiss.org/publications/military-balance/the-military-balance-2008/themilitary-balance-2008/> (accessed 1 November 2008).

84 A. Bright, "U.S. Slaps Arms Sale Ban on Venezuela," Christian Science Monitor (Online), Strategy Page, 17 May 2006, 1. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0517/dailyUpdate.html> (accessed 26 January 2009).

concerned. The most notable U.S. efforts in this area were the formal protest lodged with Russia at the end of 2004 concerning the deal for Russian assault rifles<sup>85</sup> and the November 2005 U.S. request that Spain not carry through its agreement with Venezuela for coastal patrol boats and aircraft.<sup>86</sup> In both cases, Spain and Russia declined to alter the plans in place to deliver military hardware to Venezuela.<sup>87</sup> Spain, however, later recanted and cancelled the deal a few months later. The United States was successful in preventing sales to Venezuela from Israel,<sup>88</sup> Brazil,<sup>89</sup> and France,<sup>90</sup> as the items in question contained proprietary U.S. technology. By choosing to formalize a weapons ban on Venezuela, the United States simply documented what had already been its unofficial policy.

The U.S. efforts to dissuade other countries from selling military equipment to Venezuela may actually have served as a catalyst for crystallization of the Russian and Venezuelan relationship insomuch as military sales are involved. With the United States having reduced Chávez's options for weapons suppliers, it is somewhat natural that the Venezuelan President continued and expanded efforts to cooperate with Presidents Putin and Medvedev on military arms agreements. For Russia's part, the United States assisted

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85 Nicholas Kralev, "Rice Protests Deal to Arm Venezuela," The Washington Times, 21 April 2005. [http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p\\_product=WT&p\\_theme=wt&p\\_action=search&p\\_maxdocs=200&p\\_topdoc=1&p\\_text\\_direct-0=1099FB7C85381901&p\\_field\\_direct-0=document\\_id&p\\_perpage=10&p\\_sort=YMD\\_date:D&s\\_trackval=GooglePM](http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p_product=WT&p_theme=wt&p_action=search&p_maxdocs=200&p_topdoc=1&p_text_direct-0=1099FB7C85381901&p_field_direct-0=document_id&p_perpage=10&p_sort=YMD_date:D&s_trackval=GooglePM) (accessed 20 April 2009).

86 "Spain-Venezuela Arms Deal Nears," BBC News (online), 26 November 2005. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4472342.stm> (accessed 20 April 2009). See also: "Spain Defies U.S., Seals Arms Deal with Venezuela," Pakistan Dawn (Online), 30 November 2005. <http://www.dawn.com/2005/11/30/int8.htm> (accessed 16 January 2009).

87 "Chavez Applauds Spain for 'Resisting' U.S. on Arms," China Daily (Online), 28 November 2005, 1. [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-11/28/content\\_498485.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-11/28/content_498485.htm) (accessed 16 January 2009). See also: Spain Defies U.S., Seals Arms Deal with Venezuela. See also: W. Chislett, "Spain and the United States: So Close, Yet so Far," El Cano Royal Institute Working Papers 23, 25 September 2006.

88 Spain Defies U.S., Seals Arms Deal with Venezuela. See also: C. Kraul, "U.S. Officially Bans Arms Sales to Venezuela," LA Times, 16 May 2006, A16. <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/may/16/world/fg-venezuela16> (accessed 16 January 2009).

89 F. Sanchez, "Venezuela Steps Up Arms Spending," Seattle Times (Online), 31 May 2006. <http://community.seattletimes.nwsource.com/archive/?date=20060531&slug=venezuela31> (accessed 15 January 2009). See also: Kraul, U.S. Officially Bans Arms Sales to Venezuela.

90 Caribbean and Latin America, The Military Balance, 2008. <http://www.iiss.org/publications/military-balance/the-military-balance-2008/the-military-balance-2008/> (accessed 1 November 2008). See also: Kraul, U.S. Officially Bans Arms Sales to Venezuela.

in knocking out competition that might otherwise have provided balance to Venezuela's decision making on arms purchases and suppliers. The manifestation of Russia's preferred status as an arms supplier to Venezuela was evidenced the following year in 2007, when two major agreements were signed indicating Venezuelan purchases of five Kilo-class submarines complete with torpedoes, anti-ship missiles, and land attack missiles.<sup>91</sup> These purchases found support in the Venezuelan defense budget for 2007, which increased yet again to 2.56 billion dollars.<sup>92</sup> The context of the arms deals between the two countries also changed to include longer time horizons for future deals (until 2013) and multiple deal contracts spread over greater periods of time.<sup>93</sup>

President Chávez's trip to Russia in September 2008 saw yet another demonstration of Venezuelan desire to purchase military equipment. The Russian media reported that the Venezuelan leader wished to acquire 20 air defense systems and several submarines for a total value of over one billion U.S. dollars. Chávez himself indicated to ITAR-TASS (the Russian press agency) that he also wanted tanks.<sup>94</sup> One interesting note regarding the agreements discussed in June and September was the Russian promise of one billion U.S. dollars in loans for Venezuela to purchase military equipment.<sup>95</sup> Venezuelan willingness to utilize loans to purchase military equipment represents a continuation of the "Umbrella Law," which enables the military to purchase weapons through overseas funding sources. Previously, the Venezuelan finance ministry had proposed that this funding mechanism be gradually eliminated and future procurements be funded by the regular budget, including foreign reserves and oil income surpluses.<sup>96</sup>

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91 Caribbean and Latin America, *The Military Balance*, 2008.

92 Ibid.

93 "Venezuela to Buy Russian Submarines, Air Defense Systems," RIA Novosti (Online), 18 June 2007, 1. <http://en.rian.ru/world/20070618/67363794.html> (accessed 16 January 2009).

94 G. Faulconbridge, "Venezuela's Chavez Seeks Arms Deals in Russia," International Herald Tribune (Online), 21 July 2008, 1. <http://www.iht.com/articles/reuters/2008/07/21/america/OUKWD-UK-VENEZUELA-CHAVEZ-RUSSIA.php> (accessed 17 January 2009).

95 "Russia Lends \$1bn to Venezuela to Buy Arms," The Times of India (Online), 25 September 2008, 1. [http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/Russia\\_lends\\_Venezuela\\_1bn\\_for\\_arms/articleshow/3527626.cms](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/Russia_lends_Venezuela_1bn_for_arms/articleshow/3527626.cms) (accessed 26 January 2009).

96 "Caribbean and Latin America," *The Military Balance* 107, no. 1 (2007): 51-92. <http://www.iiss.org/publications/military-balance/the-military-balance-2007/> (accessed 26 January 2009).

## **2. Energy and Economic Agreements**

In 2000, the same year during which Russian President Vladimir Putin took over the reins of government from Boris Yeltsin, bilateral trade between Russia and Venezuela grew by 350 percent.<sup>97</sup> This spike in trade represented the beginnings of an increasingly fundamental aspect of the relationship between the two countries. The evolution of the energy connection between these two countries holds major consequences for the remainder of the world. Russia controls 26 percent of natural gas imports into Europe and this number is expected to reach between 40 and 50 percent by 2020.<sup>98</sup> Venezuela, meanwhile, supplies the world's largest energy consumer, the United States, with 11 percent of its energy imports.<sup>99</sup>

The ascendance of Putin and Chávez to power in the first years of the new millennium was accompanied by rising energy prices, which enabled both countries to emerge from the very difficult decade of the 1990s. With both countries becoming economically feasible and more comfortable internationally as a result of rising energy prices, mutual cooperation in the energy sector manifested itself as a priority in the infancy of both Presidencies.<sup>100</sup> In December 2001, much of the groundwork was laid for eventual cooperation on energy and economic matters with the establishment of a cooperation commission, a cooperative banking agreement to create favorable conditions for Venezuelan and Russian investors, and joint development of natural resources, to include construction of infrastructure for extraction and removal of those resources.<sup>101</sup>

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97 "Putin, Venezuela's Chavez Plan Anti-U.S. Alliance," newsmax.com (Online), 15 May 2001. <http://archive.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2001/5/14/171808.shtml> (accessed 15 January 2009).

98 K. C. Smith, "Russian Energy Pressure Fails to Unite Europe," CSIS Euro-Focus 13, no. 1 (2007).

99 F. Verrastro and S. Ladislaw, "Providing Energy Security in an Interdependent World," The Washington Quarterly 30, no. 4 (2007), 95-104.

100 "On the Outcomes of the Visit of the Chairman of the Russian Federation, Mikhail Kasyanov, to Latin America," press release from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 17 December 2001.

<http://www.ln.mid.ru/bl.nsf/5d5fc0348b8b2d26c3256def0051fa20/d8ef6e5a1e39998c43256b26002d7098?OpenDocument> (accessed 21 January 2009).

101 Ibid.

The effect of Russian oil production on the dynamics of decisions made by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) played a small part in the relationship between Russia and Venezuela. Early on in the relationship, when oil prices were significantly less than the levels at which they peaked in 2008, Russia vacillated between support for and against OPEC's goals. This has been posited by some as a possible source of tension between the two sides that might have caused the strength of the relationship to be less than it might have otherwise been.<sup>102</sup> Chávez, for his part, has, from the very beginning, been active in courting Russian (along with other countries') cooperation with OPEC regarding coordinated cuts in output in order to manipulate market oil prices and thereby create "stability" for producers.<sup>103</sup> These efforts, moderated by Chávez, between OPEC and non-OPEC countries have continued up to the present.<sup>104</sup> The successful Venezuelan attempt to entice Russia to alter oil output in accordance with OPEC serve to reduce the loss of market share faced by OPEC countries (including Venezuela) during periods of reduced production (as non-OPEC countries' output remains unchanged).<sup>105</sup>

Since the beginnings of the relationship's intensification under Chávez and Putin, both Venezuela and Russia have worked diligently to further extend cooperation in the energy realm. Oil and gas have been by far the main focus of the agreements signed thus far. Three agreements in 2002 were all centered on oil and gas.<sup>106</sup> In November 2004 it was announced that Russia and Venezuela would sign more agreements opening "markets for oil and petrochemical products, building pipelines, and coordinating efforts aimed at" establishing "fair value" for heavy oil derivatives in the international

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102 Katz, *The Putin-Chávez Partnership*.

103 H. A. Trinkunas, *Crafting Civilian Control of the Military in Venezuela: A Comparative Perspective* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

104 S. Husain, "Venezuela Advocating 'fair price' for Oil," *Pakistan Dawn* (Online), 06 August 2006. <http://www.dawn.com/2006/08/06/ebr3.htm> (accessed 21 January 2009). See also: Russ Dallen, "Venezuela Says Russia to 'Cooperate' with OPEC," *Latin American Herald Tribune* (Online), November 2008. <http://www.lah.com/article.asp?ArticleId=321212&CategoryId=13280> (accessed 21 January 2009).

105 D. Babusiaux, "Panorama 2004: Oil Supply and Demand" *L'Institute français du Pétrole*, 05 January 2004, 1-5. [www.ifp.fr/IFP/en/events/panorama/](http://www.ifp.fr/IFP/en/events/panorama/) (accessed 4 January 2009).

106 "Russia and Venezuela Shake Hands," FSU Energy, 10 May 2002. [http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary\\_0286-31064533\\_ITM](http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-31064533_ITM) (accessed 21 January 2009).

market.<sup>107</sup> November 2005 saw what could begin to be described as a regularly scheduled series of economic and energy agreements. Again, these agreements touched on oil and gas, but this time they also extended to deals made for energy exploration.<sup>108</sup> At this juncture, there were already 37 existing agreements covering cooperation on, or purchase of, military technology, finance, infrastructure, and energy.<sup>109</sup>

The agreements continued to roll out from underneath the pens of Chávez and Putin in 2006, with new deals directed at assisting in construction of pipe making plants, further development of Venezuelan oil fields, long term development of the Venezuelan gas industry, and outlook for development of the country's mineral base.<sup>110</sup> Vagit Alekperov, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Russian oil company Lukoil, was also backed by the Kremlin in his attempts to purchase Venezuela's 50 percent equity share in Germany's Ruhr Oil refining group.<sup>111</sup> In 2007, U.S. oil companies Exxon and Conoco Phillips walked away from Venezuela in response to stricter terms announced by the Venezuelan government for certain oil companies operating in Venezuela.<sup>112</sup> The remaining companies faced levying of back taxes and were forced into holding minority shares. That same year, Russian state-owned Gazprom announced more agreements on

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107 "Venezuela to Sign Energy Agreement with Russia," APS Review Oil Market Trends, 22 November 2004. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-125078795.html> (accessed 21 January 2009).

108 "Venezuela, Russia Sign Agreement to Strengthen Relations," People's Daily (Online), 12 November 2005. [http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200511/12/eng20051112\\_220740.html](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200511/12/eng20051112_220740.html) (accessed 21 January 2009).

109 Ibid.

110 M. Bhadrakumar, "Venezuela, Russia: Comrades in Arms," Asia Times (Online), 02 August 2006. [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/central\\_Asia/HH02Ag01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/central_Asia/HH02Ag01.html) (accessed 15 January 2009). See also: "Russia—LUKoil in Venezuela," APS Review Oil Market Trends, 11 March 2007. <http://www.allbusiness.com/agriculture-forestry-fishing-hunting/support-activities/3890065-1.html> (accessed 21 January 2009).

111 Ibid.

112 M. Mirovalev, "Venezuelan President Vows to Broaden Russian Investment," International Herald Tribune, 28 June 2007. <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/06/29/europe/EU-GEN-Russia-Venezuela-Chavez.php?page=2> (accessed 21 January 2009).

exploration and production of both oil and natural gas. The Russian government, meanwhile, “made the suggestion to expand the list of companies working in Venezuela to include state-controlled Rosneft and Gazprom Neft.”<sup>113</sup>

More recent energy agreements have become increasingly all-encompassing in nature. In July 2008, during another Chávez visit to the Kremlin, Russian companies signed yet another set of cooperation agreements with the Venezuelan government. These agreements are more comprehensive than previous ones in that they provide for joint study (a renewal of the 2005 contract with Lukoil) and “joint production of extra heavy crude, improvement of crude quality, and export sales of the improved crude.”<sup>114</sup> It would seem that these agreements are the first which facilitate a joint enterprise in which every aspect of the oil cycle—from exploration for the oil to its sale on the international market—is covered by the agreement, allowing both countries to enjoy the profits.<sup>115</sup>

While oil and gas certainly have stolen the show with regard to energy and economic agreements between Russia and Venezuela, there are other agreements covering different forms of energy that have been enacted. In July 2006, the Russian company Tekhnopromexport and the Venezuelan government arrived at an agreement on construction of a 900 million dollar hydroelectric plant.<sup>116</sup> Two months later, Russian Railways and the Elektrostal Heavy Machinery Plant were awarded participation in designing the Venezuelan railway system and production of rails.<sup>117</sup> Of particular interest are the more recent agreements signed during President Dmitry Medvedev’s visit

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<sup>113</sup> "Russia Wants Venezuela Work," The Oil Daily—Energy Intelligence Group, 02 July 2007. [http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary\\_0286-31883782\\_ITM](http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-31883782_ITM) (accessed 21 January 2009).

<sup>114</sup> "Russian Firms Sign Cooperation Deals with Venezuelan Oil Giant," RIA Novosti (Online), 22 July 2008. <http://en.rian.ru/business/20080722/114658286.html> (accessed 21 January 2009).

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> N. Skorlygina and D. Rebrov, "Russian Lead the Way Back," Kommersant Moscow—Russia's Daily (Online), 19 September 2007. [http://www.kommersant.com/p805982/r\\_1/foreign\\_trade\\_investment/](http://www.kommersant.com/p805982/r_1/foreign_trade_investment/) (accessed 21 January 2009).

<sup>117</sup> Skorlygina and Rebrov, Russian Lead the Way Back.

to Venezuela, the first ever visit of a Russian President to that country.<sup>118</sup> Prior to the visit, President Chávez announced that Russian and Venezuelan technical teams had already begun working on plans for a new nuclear reactor to be built in Zulia.<sup>119</sup> This type of agreement on nuclear energy paves the way for cooperation in a technical field that has traditionally involved guarded technology. Such cooperation has also opened the door to criticism from countries concerned with Venezuela's connection to Iran, given international concern over the ambitious nuclear policy of that country.<sup>120</sup>

In general, the energy and economic agreements between Russia and Venezuela demonstrate a mutually beneficial relationship that has grown increasingly close over the past 8 years. Nationalization of the petroleum industry in Venezuela in 2006 facilitated state-to-state agreements between Russia and Venezuela for the joint development of Venezuela's petroleum resources.<sup>121</sup> Traditional foreign companies such as British Petroleum, Conoco-Phillips, and Exxon either left or lost significant amounts of their assets, permitting other foreign companies (particularly Lukoil and Gazprom) to increase the foothold established by way of earlier agreements. In a broader sense, Russian companies have become the quickest, most effective means for entry into Venezuelan markets. Venezuelan law stipulates that contracts and agreements with Russian participation are "without tender" and are "subject to several beneficial conditions" including fast track procedures and no competition.<sup>122</sup> The benefits of association with Russian companies operating in Venezuela are perhaps best verified by "offers from foreigners to buy Russian businesses in order to receive priority treatment."<sup>123</sup>

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118 Simon Romero, "Venezuela and Russia Sign Accords," New York Times, 27 November 2008, A26. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/28/world/americas/28venez.html?ref=europe> (accessed 22 January 2009).

119 Dallen, Chavez Says Venezuela and Russia Will Build a Nuclear Reactor in Oil-Rich Zulia.

120 J. Daremblum, "Putin's Dangerous Games," The American (Online), 12 January 2009. <http://www.american.com/archive/2009/putin2019s-dangerous-games> (accessed 22 January 2009).

121 Joshua Prescott, "An Examination of Perception and Knowledge Concerning the Venezuelan Government under the Leadership of President Chavez," Master's Thesis, August 2007, University of Texas at Arlington, 1-80.

122 Skorlygina and Rebrov, Russian Lead the Way Back.

123 Ibid.

### C. EMERGENCE OF A STRATEGIC COALITION?

Venezuela, from the very first visit of President Hugo Chávez to Moscow in May 2001, has sought to characterize its agreements with Russia as efforts of a larger “strategic alliance.”<sup>124</sup> For the most part, Chávez’s declarations of an alliance with Russia were largely ignored or perceived to be more grandstanding than actual fact. Even leadership in Russia seemed to downplay its association with Venezuela, perhaps because it was unclear how long Chávez would remain in power. If such concerns did contribute to a Russian exercise in caution, they were well-founded, as the Chávez administration faced multiple challenges to its authority in 2002. The most well-known and often discussed of these was the coup attempt in April 2002, which saw Chávez removed from power for a period of days.<sup>125</sup> The opposition was recognized very quickly by the United States, however Chávez was shortly returned to power due to pressure from the popular sector in Caracas.<sup>126</sup> The massive increase in Venezuelan GDP from 2003 until 2008, along with political adjustments by the Chávez administration following the coup attempts in 2002 assisted the Venezuelan President in consolidating his power and ensured an improved level of stability for the Venezuelan relationship with Russia.<sup>127</sup>

Since the political turbulence in the early days of his administration, President Chávez’s situation has become more stable and Russia has correspondingly moved incrementally closer with each passing year. A “souring” of U.S.–Russian relations over Washington-backed events such as the Rose Revolution in Georgia, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, (which occurred simultaneous with Chávez’s November 2004 visit), and U.S. action in Iraq may have also pushed the Russian viewpoint to conform

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124 S. Wilson, "Chavez's Unfinished Revolution; Venezuelan's Accomplishments Fall Short of His Rhetoric," Washington Post, 21 May 2001. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-451606.html> (accessed 26 January 2009).

125 Shifter, In Search of Hugo Chavez.

126 S. Ellner and D. Hellinger, Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization, and Conflict (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004).

127 Weisbrot and Sandoval, Update: The Venezuela Economy in the Chávez Years.

more closely with that of Chávez.<sup>128</sup> Russian willingness to act in opposition to U.S. policy preferences followed suit, thereby transitioning the verbal context of the relationship with Venezuela to one of action. With the strengthening of the Russian–Venezuelan relationship, an answer to the fundamental enigma becomes even more important: does the relationship truly carry strategic weight for those involved?

What the United States previously considered an innocuous nuisance on the international scene in very early 2000, is beginning to be perceived as a threat to U.S. interests in Latin America and elsewhere. The close collaboration between these two countries has emerged as a concern for some in the U.S. government and has been discussed during sessions of Congress.<sup>129</sup> There are, in fact, some indications that illustrate an evolution of the Russian–Venezuelan relationship from cautiously simple, mutually beneficial contracts to today’s complex, multifaceted agreements. The complex recent agreements, championed as the fulfillment of the mutually expressed desire for a multipolar world, seem to provide evidence of a long-term, shared strategic thrust on the part of Russia and Venezuela. For purposes of this thesis, in order for the relationship to be considered strategic, it must produce a series of results that support achievement of long-term goals derived from national interests. While Chávez and Putin declared the relationship to be strategic very early on, thorough analysis of foreign policy goals and the relationship’s role in achieving them is required to determine if this is, in fact, the case.

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128 Katz, *The Putin-Chávez Partnership*.

129 C. M. Ribando and B. Vaughn, "Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade: Key Issues for the 110th Congress," Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2006.

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### **III. THE RUSSIAN–VENEZUELAN RELATIONSHIP: THE CENTRALITY OF PERCEPTIONS**

The Russian–Venezuelan relationship offers a challenge to traditional, theoretical understanding of international relations. The integrated approach to governance of those in control in both countries, influences the state to champion interests of the few. In this scenario, perceptions and identities matter as much as acting rationally or maintaining a balance of power. The attraction between Russia and Venezuela is intensified by this similar approach to governance and a shared wariness of U.S. international influence. Even though traditional theory may be challenged by the relationship, however, a thorough review of the origins and development of Russian and Venezuelan perceptions and world views provides the clarity necessary for understanding the ends toward which each is striving.

#### **A. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO RUSSIAN–VENEZUELAN RELATIONS**

The two dominant theories of international relations, realism and liberalism, are often used to analyze foreign policy and discern the paradigms in use during the decision making of states. Utilization of these theories, while insightful and logical in some ways, does not provide the necessary insight required to fully understand or properly evaluate the Russian–Venezuelan relationship. The realist and liberal constructs are unable to provide a conclusive, parsimonious analysis of the relationship because they are unable to, in the Russian and Venezuelan case, reflect the importance of world views in formation of national interests and foreign policy. Injecting a constructivist paradigm into the analysis allows for a discussion of how world views might affect national interests.

##### **1. Assumptions in International Relations Theory Ignore Perspectives**

The realist and liberal theories of international relations rely upon several assumptions in order to advance explanations for state behavior. To begin, each assumes

that the international system is anarchic. As such, there is no controlling interest that levies rules or requirements for state action.<sup>130</sup> Additionally, it is assumed that rational actors execute foreign policy in order to achieve and secure national interests.<sup>131</sup> Generally speaking, each of these theories has sufficiently withstood criticism to be considered one of today's dominant theories of international relations. However, the assumption that rational actors dominate decision making in international relations is questioned by many scholars and remains far from certain.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, the question of rationality is decided based upon the observer's own interpretation of what is rational. What makes perfect sense to one individual or culture may be incomprehensible to another.

Not only does rationality present problems for liberal and realist usefulness as an explanation, but the assumption that foreign policy and international relations are aimed at achieving national interests is a stumbling block as well. More correctly, it is the analysis of national interests that represents the problem. Any evaluation of international relations with regard to national interests will necessarily pass judgment on what those interests are and how a state's actions hope to achieve them. Again, the same scenario is presented: the observer's interpretation is the deciding factor in defining the interests and the motivation behind actions of a given state. In most cases, the observer naturally relies upon his or her own experiences and understanding to form an explanation. With this approach, the perspective of the observer is as important as objective factors in shaping the analysis of the national interest.<sup>133</sup>

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130 J. Nye, "Neorealism and Neoliberalism," *World Politics* 40, no. 2 (1988): 235-251. Also: Rousseau, *Identifying Threats and Threatening Identities: The Social Construction of Realism and Liberalism*.

131 Nye, Neorealism and Neoliberalism.

132 Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1999), 416. See also: M. Kahler, "Rationality in International Relations," *International Organization* 52, no. 04 (2005), 919-941.

133 Rousseau, *Identifying Threats and Threatening Identities: The Social Construction of Realism and Liberalism*.

A constructivist, perceptions-based approach is necessary for a proper understanding of state interests. This is especially true for interests of states with non-diverse, less representative power structures, such as Russia and Venezuela. Analysis of state action produced by such structures must pay close attention to the ideals and views of the individuals who craft policy. The effect and influence of world views, thoughts, and feelings are magnified in a system where there are fewer checks and balances on authority, as they enjoy greater input into the decision making model (relative to more representative power structures). This does not mean, however, that theory is without value in explaining international relations, but rather that theory alone cannot fully appreciate and understand the complexities involved with analyzing international relations.

## **2. A Realist Assessment**

Supporters of the realist school of thought are encouraged by an examination of Venezuelan relations with Russia. The statements and behavior of the Chávez administration demonstrate practical execution of a desire to utilize the relationship with Russia to update and improve its armed forces and further increase independence from U.S. influence. When Chávez makes statements that paint the United States as a threat to Venezuela and all of Latin America,<sup>134</sup> it is reasonable to believe that decisions to purchase weapons and conduct military exercises with Russia are sponsored by Chávez's realist view of the world. The Venezuelan President's very public view of the United States has been consistent and increasingly adversarial since his first days in office. If Chávez is a realist, the military exercises conducted in the fall of 2008 with Russia were originated by Venezuela precisely because they illustrated Venezuelan (and others') ability to engage in classic balancing behavior against the U.S. threat.<sup>135</sup> So, if realists

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<sup>134</sup> "Chávez Says U.S. Fleet a Regional Threat," abcnews.com (online), 21 July 2008. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=5285724> (accessed 22 February 2009).

<sup>135</sup> Waltz, Theory of International Politics.

are correct, Venezuelan recognition of a U.S. threat fostered and encouraged establishment of a relationship with Russia by which the Venezuelan state can respond.<sup>136</sup>

Russia's presence in the relationship can also be explained from a realist perspective. While the Kremlin may not feel as directly threatened as does Chávez, traditionally ingrained Russian priorities have also felt threatened by U.S. policy. The U.S. missile shield in Poland, NATO expansion, and U.S. support of Georgia provide subjects that are used by the realist school of thought to explain Russia's eagerness to participate in an alliance with Venezuela.<sup>137</sup> A pro-Moscow political analyst has even indicated that the military exercises with Venezuela were Russia's response to U.S. ship deployments to Georgia immediately following the conflict in August 2008.<sup>138</sup> The most recent example of Russian realism was the Kremlin's maneuver to influence the Kyrgyz government to evict the United States from a military base in that country that serves as a critical supply node for the U.S. and NATO effort in Afghanistan. In this situation, power politics of Russia are being utilized to force the United States to run all of its initiatives through Moscow first.<sup>139</sup> Realists believe that this type of behavior along with the relationship with Venezuela betray the Russian desire to strengthen its position relative to the United States.

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136 As Waltz described post-Cold War balancing in: K. N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* 25, no. 1 (2000), 5-41.

137 T. A. Shakleyina and A. D. Bogaturov, "The Russian Realist School of International Relations," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 37, no. 1 (2004), 37-51.

138 I. Isachenkov, "Russia and Venezuela Cooperate on Military Exercise, Mounting Tensions with the US," [huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com) (online), 09 September 2008.  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/09/08/russia-and-venezuela-coop\\_n\\_124764.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/09/08/russia-and-venezuela-coop_n_124764.html) (accessed 22 February 2009).

139 B. Whitmore, "Washington, Moscow Edge toward New Relationship," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 12 February 2009.  
[http://www.rferl.org/Content/Washington\\_Moscow\\_Edge\\_Toward\\_New\\_Relationship/1491916.html](http://www.rferl.org/Content/Washington_Moscow_Edge_Toward_New_Relationship/1491916.html) (accessed 22 February 2009).

The logic of realism as presented above certainly appears reasonable, especially when one considers that both parties in the relationship make it a point to highlight multipolarity as one of the critical factors motivating the relationship.<sup>140</sup> However, realism is not able to successfully explain many questions that arise from examinations of Russian and Venezuelan foreign policy. First, if the desire is to counter the power and influence of the global hegemon, how can Venezuela's behavior be considered rational considering the degree to which the fate of the Venezuelan economy depends on U.S. purchase and refinement of its oil? What happens if Venezuelan oil is no longer purchased by America? How would the drastic drop in GDP affect Venezuela's ability to counter U.S. influence?<sup>141</sup> Also, while Chávez trumpets the need to protect Latin America from a U.S. security threat, and has attempted to garner support for a Latin American security alliance, these efforts clearly take a backseat to economic initiatives. Given the scope of Venezuelan economic ties with the United States and others, the "imperialism" and security "threat" of the United States is, in practice, much less of a concern than a realist explanation would convey.<sup>142</sup> While Chávez may not be the most adoring of U.S. fans, his rhetorical warnings of U.S. domination and political distancing of Venezuela are at odds with the practical nature of a much closer U.S.–Venezuela agenda, notwithstanding stated efforts to increase diversification of Venezuelan oil exports as an effort to eliminate dependence on the U.S. market.<sup>143</sup>

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140 S. Guterman, "Russia: Putin and Chávez Plug 'Multi-Polar World,'" Nachrichten English News (Online), 26 September 2008. <http://www.welt.de/english-news/article2495684/Putin-and-Chavez-plug-multi-polar-world.html> (accessed 18 February 2009).

141 "Venezuela Energy Data, Statistics and Analysis—Oil, Gas, Electricity, Coal," Energy Information Administration, U.S. Government, January 2009. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/Venezuela/Oil.html> (accessed 25 February 2009).

142 Ramírez makes the argument that Venezuelan behavior is best understood as domestically based, anti-imperialist, twenty-first century socialism rather than response to an exterior threat. See: C. V. Ramírez, "Hemos Derrotado El Diablo! Chávez Supporters, Anti-Neoliberalism, and Twenty-First Century Socialism," *Identities* 15, no. 2 (2008), 147-170.

143 S. Romero, "Chávez Backs Off Threats to Halt Oil Exports to U.S." *New York Times*, 18 February 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/18/world/americas/18venez.html> (accessed 25 February 2009).

There are problems with realist explanations on the Russian side, as well. For example, if Russia is able to coerce the United States into negotiating with Moscow regarding how it will operate in Afghanistan and Central Asia, how does this political victory rebuff the United States or decrease the disparity in power? While Russia may gain some input (assuming there are no other options for the United States), the foreign policy goals of the United States could still be met and U.S. influence in Central Asia would inevitably spread. Further, the Russians offered assistance immediately upon the Kyrgyz announcement to expel the United States.<sup>144</sup> This is more indicative of a power play designed to garner U.S. recognition of Russian status as the gatekeeper for issues in its near abroad. Additionally, recent indications point to the notion that Moscow's decision regarding the deployment of Iskander missiles could be reversed.<sup>145</sup> Such a reversal would obviously be a step down from past rhetoric and would seem to add weight to very recent statements that Russia is interested in improving U.S.–Russian relations. The relationship between Russia and Venezuela could be considered an outcome of a shared realist perspective, but there are a number of clues that call the validity of this assertion into question.

### **3. Liberal Institutionalist Explanations**

The counterargument to realism is provided by theorists of liberalism. This perspective argues that the real motivation for construction and maintenance of the Russian–Venezuelan relationship is the mutual economic and political benefit enjoyed by each member.<sup>146</sup> Logic dictates a fair amount of mutual benefit for both countries resulting from the relationship; otherwise there would be no reason for it to exist. While realists argue that the benefit or product is increased security through balancing, liberal proponents would take care to point out the economic and political advantages inherent

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<sup>144</sup> C. Levy, "Poker-Faced, Russia Flaunts its Afghan Card," New York Times, 21 February 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/22/weekinreview/22levy.html> (accessed 25 February 2009).

<sup>145</sup> N. Barkin and K. Gehmlich, "Russia: Won't Install Missiles if no U.S. Shield," Reuters, 6 February 2009. <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE5154ZB20090206> (accessed 25 February 2009).

<sup>146</sup> Joshua Prescott, An Examination of Perception and Knowledge Concerning the Venezuelan Government Under the Leadership of Hugo Chávez.

for each country.<sup>147</sup> While realists focus on how a threat or perceived threat causes balancing and alliance building, liberal proponents describe the Russian–Venezuelan phenomenon as more likely motivated by the benefits of working together.<sup>148</sup>

There is no denying that as a direct result of the relationship with Russia, Chávez is likely better able to pursue his desire of creating a regional alliance in Latin America, which would act as a counterweight to U.S. policy and interests.<sup>149</sup> Venezuela secures Russian assistance on oil and gas issues (everything from price regulation to assistance with future exploration), military hardware, and expression of international political support for Chávez’s goals.<sup>150</sup> Each of these three areas of cooperation is beneficial for Venezuela in both relative and absolute terms. More importantly, together they boost the legitimacy of Chávez’s goals and stated vision for Venezuela and for the Latin American region.<sup>151</sup> The open-ended, ever closer relationship with Russia serves as Venezuela’s proof that Latin America can find alternatives to what has traditionally been U.S. support and can create beneficial agreements. While the viability of those alternatives may be up for debate, the result is that Venezuela can potentially be considered a leader and pioneer by others in the region.<sup>152</sup> The gradual, leftward political trend in Latin America is perhaps an indicator of Chávez’s ability to influence neighbors in the region. At the very least, it is circumstantial evidence of Chávez’s vision being shared by other Latin

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147 R. O. Keohane, "Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond," In: Neorealism and its Critics (1986), 158-203. See also: Rousseau, Identifying Threats and Threatening Identities: The Social Construction of Realism and Liberalism.

148 R. H. Jackson and G. Sorensen, Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches (Oxford University Press, U.S.A., 2007).

149 P. Evans, "Is an Alternative Globalization Possible?" *Politics & Society* 36, no. 2 (2008), 271.

150 S. Johnson and others, "What a Chávez Win Means in Venezuela and for U.S. Policy," *Constitution* 1284, 2006.

151 M. G. Manwaring, "Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, Bolivarian Socialism, and Asymmetric Warfare," Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College Carlisle Barracks, PA, 2005.

152 J. Corrales, "Hugo Boss," *Foreign Policy* 152 (2006), 32-40.

America countries.<sup>153</sup> Additionally, Russian–Venezuelan agreements that involve cooperation on energy projects inside other Latin American countries point to the conclusion that greater Latin America is indeed influenced by the Chávez vision of Latin America and twenty-first century socialism.<sup>154</sup> Bolivia, for example, has not lacked foreign interest in developing its gas and oil resources. If the agreement between Russia and Venezuela concerning development of Bolivian resources was predicated solely upon energy needs, what prevented this development from occurring several years before with the assistance of a different, non-Russian company or government? Further, why was it necessary (or practical) for Venezuela to negotiate an agreement with Russia that involved Bolivia? The relationship with Russia has produced an engine of legitimacy and recognition through which Venezuela has been able to build support for its agenda.

The lack of a direct threat to Russia ostensibly verifies the suitability of liberalism as explicatory rationale for development of the Russian–Venezuelan relationship. Russia's involvement with Venezuela in the vacuum of a persistent threat leads one to assume that the potential benefits are the deciding factor for Russia's participation (versus a perceived threat). As outlined previously, the economic benefits of the relationship with Venezuela are substantial for Russia. Further, the deepening of involvement between the two countries brings Russia increased economic benefit as more and more of Latin America opens up to cooperative relations with Russia.<sup>155</sup> The similar political goal shared by Venezuela and Russia of ensuring a multipolar world and countering the world's hegemonic power is only a fringe benefit of the relationship. In

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153 Castaneda, Latin America's Left Turn. See also: M. Albright, "Are Putin and Chávez the Future?" *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2008), 75-78.

154 Corrales, Hugo Boss. See also: S. Jobst, "The Venezuelan-Russian Alliance and American Superpower: Emergence of A Multipolar World?" [salem-news.com](http://www.salem-news.com) (online), 24 February 2009. [http://www.salem-news.com/articles/february242009/ruso\\_venez\\_2-24-09.php](http://www.salem-news.com/articles/february242009/ruso_venez_2-24-09.php) (accessed 16 March 2009).

155 Corrales, Hugo Boss. See also: S. Jobst, The Venezuelan-Russian Alliance and American Superpower: Emergence of A Multipolar World? See also: Miller-Llana and Weir, Russia's New Presence in Latin America.

truly classic liberal form, the more these countries cooperate, the closer they become, the more similarly their aims develop, and the more beneficial the relationship turns out to be for all parties involved.<sup>156</sup>

Before assigning liberalism as the primary motivation for the quickening of the relationship, however, it is imperative to understand how this characterization can become awkward in explaining the relations of Russia and Venezuela. First, while benefits have increased for both parties as the relationship has progressed, the agreements have not necessarily become easier to negotiate. Most recently, Chávez made several trips to Moscow to overcome Russian reluctance to loan Venezuela one billion dollars for arms purchases.<sup>157</sup> It would appear that the trust common between allies is still not present several years after the initial agreements between the two countries.<sup>158</sup>

Secondly, although cooperation can clearly be observed, there has been no serious effort aimed at building political or civil institutions between Russia and Venezuela that would preserve the gains made. This is especially difficult to explain given how actively Chávez has attempted to build institutions in the Latin American region.<sup>159</sup> The Venezuelan President has spearheaded several Latin American initiatives, as mentioned earlier, but has done relatively little to create the same kinds of ties with Russia that his country has with Cuba or Bolivia, to name two examples.<sup>160</sup> Objectively, both sides do benefit, but (diverging from the liberal institutionalist model) there is little to substantiate the idea that the arrangement is more than a temporary convenience for both. It is worth

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156 Nye, Neorealism and Neoliberalism. See also: W. Karle, "Realism and Liberalism Continue to Shape the Ways in which Policy Makers Conceptualise International Relations," *Shedden Papers*, 2003, 1-9.  
[http://209.85.173.132/search?q=cache:NRkpH2tmreAJ:www.defence.gov.au/ADC/docs/Publications/Shedden%20Papers%202003/Mr\\_Karle.pdf+realism+and+liberalism&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=5&gl=us](http://209.85.173.132/search?q=cache:NRkpH2tmreAJ:www.defence.gov.au/ADC/docs/Publications/Shedden%20Papers%202003/Mr_Karle.pdf+realism+and+liberalism&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=5&gl=us) (accessed 28 February 2009).

157 "What the Russian Papers Say," RIA Novosti (Russian Information Agency), 26 September 2008.  
<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20080926/117153227.html> (accessed 16 March 2009).

158 Katz, The Putin-Chávez Partnership.

159 R. Lapper, Living with Hugo: U.S. Policy Toward Hugo Chávez's Venezuela (Council on Foreign Relations, 2006). See also: N. Kozloff, Hugo Chávez: Oil, Politics, and the Challenge to the U.S. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

160 M. Azicri, "The Castro-Chávez Alliance," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 1 (2009), 99. See also: Cirino, Latin America "Populism for the XXI Century."

remembering also that Chávez attempted to diversify purchases of arms, but was forced to rely almost exclusively on Russia, as it is one of the very few countries willing to sell weapons over U.S. objections.<sup>161</sup>

Finally, and most problematically, while the cooperation between Russia and Venezuela may perhaps be a sign of two countries working together, the end toward which they are working is to challenge the world's hegemon and promote multipolarity. This adversarial ambition, assuming it is rewarded, ultimately leads to a confrontation between a great (and probably frustrated) hegemonic power and a bloc of less powerful countries, which have banded together to balance the scales. This is not at all indicative of liberalism leading to a smoother, more cooperative international system. Instead, it is the epitome of realist rationalization for how and why the relationship is occurring. The statements produced by Russia and Venezuela are ambiguous in this regard, as they tout the openness and beneficial nature of their relationship for Latin America, while simultaneously declaring the need and desire to counter hegemonic power and encourage a multipolar world.<sup>162</sup>

#### **4. The Alternative of Constructivism**

Realism and liberalism concentrate on the actions of states and attempt to unravel the inspiration behind them. The ultimate goal is to determine why states interact as they do and what effect this may have. With this methodology, these two theories utilize explanations of state actions to evaluate the interests and desires of those states. This certainly seems reasonable enough. As has been demonstrated, however, there are often competing explanations for these actions and some actions simply cannot be justified by theory. An alternative method for examining international relations is to use the constructivist model mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis.

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<sup>161</sup> F. Sanchez, "Venezuela Criticizes U.S. for Blocking Sale of Spanish Planes with U.S. Parts," AP Worldstream, 14 January 2006. [http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary\\_0286-12346614\\_ITM](http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-12346614_ITM) (accessed 16 March 2009).

<sup>162</sup> Guterman, Russia: Putin and Chávez Plug 'Multi-Polar World'.

The constructivist standard contemplates the role of identity and perception in the construction of national interests and subsequent policies designed to support those interests.<sup>163</sup> Instead of observing the actions of states in order to explain why a country acts as it does, the focus is placed on understanding the societal aspects that inform state actions.<sup>164</sup> The constructivist approach seeks to avoid theoretical entanglements resulting from diagnosis of state behavior, balance of power, and rational actor assumptions. This approach examines how states and their leaders view the world, in general, and also how they view their counterparts in particular, in order to better understand state interaction in each given situation. The view held is that each situation is unique and therefore state actions are not necessarily best characterized by one theory or explanation. Identity and the diversity of world views, both personal and collective, really do matter, and they play as important a part as national interests or rational action in any equation aimed at better understanding state interaction.<sup>165</sup>

Whether or not constructivism offers a predictive and parsimonious theory of international relations is an often debated topic. According to a review of Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics*<sup>166</sup>, Wendt attempted to create a "parsimonious systemic theory [of international relations]... this time from an ideational perspective."<sup>167</sup> Keohane, on the other hand, believes that Wendt's effort did not produce a theory of international relations because there are "no propositions about state behavior."<sup>168</sup> This thesis does not address this debate but instead sets out to examine the

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163 J. G. Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-Utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge," *International Organization* 52, no. 04 (2005), 855-885.

164 Rousseau, Identifying Threats and Threatening Identities: The Social Construction of Realism and Liberalism.

165 Ruggie, What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-Utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge. See also empirical research of Rousseau in: Rousseau, Identifying Threats and Threatening Identities: The Social Construction of Realism and Liberalism.

166 Wendt's work is widely regarded as the seminal literature which applies constructivism to international relations theory. A. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

167 D. C. Copeland, "The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay," *International Security* 25, no. 2 (2000), 187-212.

168 R. O. Keohane, "Ideas Part-Way Down," *Review of International Studies* 26, no. 01 (2000), 125-130.

influence of perceptions, identities, and world views of Russian and Venezuelan governmental leaders on foreign policy behavior and state interests. Constructivism supposes that interests and identities are “an important part determined by domestic rather than international factors.”<sup>169</sup> The added value of constructivism, according to Wendt, is that it incorporates both internal and external forces in analyzing the construction of state interests and identities.<sup>170</sup>

The goal of this theoretical discussion is not to determine which theory best explains the relationship between Russia and Venezuela, but simply to understand the primary theoretical approaches to that relationship. This understanding, in combination with sound analysis of interaction between state perception, interests, and policy (internal and external), can better provide an accurate evaluation of the Russian/Venezuelan relationship. In using constructivism, discussion of foreign policy of Russia or Venezuela, particularly where their relationship is concerned, must make room for both endogenous and exogenous considerations that influence or impact that foreign policy.

## B. THE CHALLENGE TO THEORY’S EXPLANATORY VALUE

Evaluation of Russian and Venezuelan political circumstances has been the mainstay of analysis surrounding the connection between Russia and Venezuela. Given the stated ambition of the relationship—to establish and enhance international multipolarity<sup>171</sup>—differences between the Russian–Venezuelan point of view and that of the United States and its political allies are front and center in the discussion. In fact, much of the evaluative effort is dedicated to highlighting the unique political ideology of both the Chávez system of governance and the less personalistic Russian system.<sup>172</sup> This

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169 Wendt, Social Theory of International Politics.

170 Wendt, Anarchy is what States make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics. See also: Wendt, Social Theory of International Politics. See also: Rousseau, Identifying Threats and Threatening Identities: The Social Construction of Realism and Liberalism.

171 Guterman, Russia: Putin and Chávez Plug 'Multi-Polar World'.

172 I. Krastev, "Democracy's "Doubles"," Journal of Democracy 17, no. 2 (2006), 52. See also: J. McCoy and D. J. Myers, *The Unraveling of Representative Democracy in Venezuela* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004). See also: O. Shvetsova, "Popular Choice and Managed Democracy: The Russian Elections of 1999 and 2000," Slavic Review 64, no. 1 (2005), 205-206.

focus communicates the impression that ostensibly close ties between Russia and Venezuela may be facilitated by, and perhaps dependent upon, likeminded political ideology. From this perspective, international solidarity is a natural outgrowth of the analogous domestic politics of each country, based on political engineering and the erosion of respect for human rights and democratic institutions.<sup>173</sup>

As Russia and Venezuela function differently from other states, a perceptions paradigm is particularly important to explain their relationship. The unique, integrated operation of the Russian and Venezuelan governments (together with other stakeholders) requires that any analysis incorporate a discussion of the effect of identity and perception on how state interests are formed.

### **1. Integrated Politics, Economics, and Interest Formation in Russia and Venezuela**

The Russian and Venezuelan Presidents direct all aspects of interaction between their nations and other countries. Chávez and Medvedev (formerly Putin) actively participate in the political realm, the economic realm, and the military–strategic realm.<sup>174</sup> As each of these realms remains under the control of the government, all three are available to be harnessed to work toward national interests. In other states, while leaders discuss the same issues, there is a separation between the political/military aspects of international relations and agreements that may or may not produce a desired outcome. With state-owned energy companies and industry, Venezuela and Russia are able to guarantee the implementation of international economic agreements (though not necessarily their success). In contrast, economic cooperation with the United States (for example) manifests itself in the form of trade agreements. These agreements focus

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173 The effect has allowed Russian and Venezuelan governance to “transform potential constraints into a partisan weapon that enables them to pursue particular group interests instead of those of the society as a whole” as described in: A. Oleinik, “Existing and Potential Constraints Limiting State Servants’ Opportunism: The Russian Case,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 24, no. 1 (2008), 156–189.

174 Much emphasis has been placed upon the importance of government meetings leading to agreements in all areas: Raylsiyaly Rivero, *A Fact of Life: Strategic Alliance for Venezuela and Russia*.

mainly on removing tariffs and fostering conditions for free trade.<sup>175</sup> However, execution of this free trade is dependent upon private individuals and businesses, independent from government control.

The freedom enjoyed by Russian and Venezuelan leaders affords them an efficient, centralized decision-making process without fear of significant institutional constraints. With far less (or better managed) political opposition than experienced in other countries, each leader is able to conclude agreements without fear of alteration or delay from domestic political processes.<sup>176</sup> The result of this centralized Russian and Venezuelan system is a unique foundation for state interaction with certain prerequisites for continued interaction and agreement with other states. In short, the feature of using state-controlled instruments to execute the requirements of agreements necessitates an exceedingly close relationship between interests of the state-controlled companies and national interests.<sup>177</sup> The interests of Russia's Gazprom in Venezuela and the energy interest of the Russian state in Venezuela arrive at the same destination. Correspondingly, PDVSA serves the interests of the Chávez administration where cooperation with Russia on energy related matters is concerned, and thus the national interests of Venezuela become its own interests. What is good for Gazprom is good for the Russian government, and what is good for PDVSA is good for the Chávez administration.<sup>178</sup>

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175 S. D. Cohen, *The Making of United States International Economic Policy: Principles, Problems, and Proposals for Reform* (Praeger/Greenwood, 2000).

176 V. Gelman, "Political Opposition in Russia: A Dying Species?" *Post-Soviet Affairs* 21, no. 3 (2005), 226-246. See also: J. Corrales and M. Penfold, "Venezuela: Crowding out the Opposition," *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 2 (2007), 99.

177 Zhuplev, *Economic Internationalization of Russia: Roots, Trends, and Scenarios*.

178 D. Hults, "Petroleos De Venezuela, SA: The Right-Hand Man of the Government," Working paper # 70, Program on Energy and Sustainable Development at the Center for Environmental Science and Policy, Stanford University, Stanford , CA, (November 2007). See also: M. I. Goldman, "The Dog Barks but the Caravan Moves on," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 15, no. 4 (2007), 360-370.

## **2. Cooperation, Mutual Dependence, and Increased Requirement for Success**

If national interests are to be realized and secured in agreements and relations with other countries, cooperation between state-controlled entities and the state itself is paramount. The state is dependent upon the proper functioning of the entity it controls, and the state-controlled entity is dependent upon the state to provide contracts and drum up international business.<sup>179</sup> This interdependence increases the stakes of relations and agreements with other states and introduces the requirement for both the state and its controlled entity to actively manage these relations and agreements in order for them to be a success.<sup>180</sup> If international relations or agreements involving state-owned or controlled entities are a failure, international and domestic political fallout will result. These efforts to avoid failure produce a collaborative management effort, which serves to narrow the scope of “national” interests, resulting in a more constrained definition of what is most important in a less free society.<sup>181</sup> The collaborative management effort must be able to direct both the political and economic activities necessary for successful international agreements and relations with other countries.<sup>182</sup> This phenomenon serves as the background for Krastev’s observation of how interests in Venezuela and Russia are not representative of the nation, but representative of those in control.<sup>183</sup> With Venezuela and Russia, it is important to understand that those who construct foreign policy are exceptionally likely to be as concerned with the domestic political landscape and their

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<sup>179</sup> Hults, Petroleos De Venezuela, SA: The Right-Hand Man of the Government. See also: Goldman, The Dog Barks but the Caravan Moves on.

<sup>180</sup> Russia and Venezuela specifically discussed in: W. Tompson, "A Frozen Venezuela? The 'Resource Curse' and Russian Politics," In: Robert Ellam ed., *Russia's Oil and Natural Gas, Bonanza or Curse?* (London: Anthem Press, 2006), 1-21.

<sup>181</sup> Using multiple indicators to compare and group Venezuela and Russia in: Zhuplev, *Economic Internationalization of Russia: Roots, Trends, and Scenarios*.

<sup>182</sup> Russia’s “managed democracy” as found in: B. Kagarlitsky, *Upravlyayemaya Demokratia: Rossia Kotoruyu Nam Navyazali* (Ultra Kultura, 2005), 1- 575. Chávez management of Venezuela detailed in: Corrales and Penfold, *Venezuela: Crowding Out the Opposition*.

<sup>183</sup> Krastev, *Democracy's Doubles.*"

own standing in it as they are concerned about the issues it addresses.<sup>184</sup> This is true for all politicians, but especially true for those who operate in the centralized and integrated framework described above.

The Russian and Venezuelan governments' reliance upon positive outcomes in state agreements and international relations produces an acute sensitivity to changes in the economic, political, or strategic-military spheres. As changes occur, the administrations of each government actively respond in order to ensure the success of the state's power structure and to avoid potential political fallout.<sup>185</sup> While Russia uses a more refined approach to manage its situation, Chávez uses controversy and agitation to manage Venezuela's situation.<sup>186</sup> Ultimately, the reason for integrating the three previously mentioned spheres into the state's international relations and international arrangements is that it provides the opportunity to extend the time horizon of control over their respective countries in both domestic and international matters. While political control in Western Europe and the United States is understood to change hands based on an electoral cycle, political control in Russia and Venezuela is managed through electoral cycles. The dynamism of Chávez and the sharing of power by the '*siloviki*' ('the powerful ones') in Russia have produced states that concentrate on maintaining power for an indefinite period of time.<sup>187</sup> The foreign policy of each government, along with its domestic policy, is designed to support the maintenance and extension of power

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184 Demonstrated by Venezuela's social spending "missions" as noted in: M. P. Sullivan, "Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 11 January 2008. <http://209.85.173.132/search?q=cache:Tu-BT1qCQ4cJ:fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32488.pdf+"venezuela:political+conditions+and+US+policy"&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us> (accessed 10 March 2009).

185 G. M. Easter, "The Russian State in the Time of Putin," Post-Soviet Affairs 24, no. 3 (2008), 199-230. See also: K. Roberts, "Latin America's Populist Revival," SAIS Review 27, no. 1 (2007), 3.

186 Corrales, Hugo Boss.

187 M. I. Goldman, "Putin, the Oligarchs & the End of Political Liberalization," The Economists' Voice 2, no. 2 (2005), 1. See also: S. Ellner, "The Contrasting Variants of the Populism of Hugo Chávez and Alberto Fujimori," Journal of Latin American Studies 35, no. 01 (2003), 139-162.

possessed by the managers of the state and alleviation of anxiety arising from political uncertainty.<sup>188</sup> Any change in a comfortable economic, political, or strategic–military agreement, whether internal or external, could potentially threaten that control.

## C. VENEZUELAN AND RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY PERCEPTIONS

The manner in which Russia and Venezuela see the world is a product of both internal and external factors. The origins and evolution of Russian and Venezuelan society, combined with experiences from interactions with other countries, have formed perceptions that are continually at work in each country's foreign policy calculus. Explanations for the strong anti–U.S. sentiment that affects this calculus are better understood when the recent history of Russian and Venezuelan interaction with the United States is reviewed. The world views of Chávez and Medvedev (previously Putin) and the uniquely integrated nature of the governments they control dictate the national interests and the path taken to secure those interests.

### 1. Origins of Perceptions

In an eloquently detailed description of Russian society and political culture from the earliest days to the middle of the 1980s, Edward Keenan explored the links between Russian village culture and late twentieth century Russian politics. This culture featured a societal and political framework in which risk avoidance, suppression of individual initiative, informal political power, maintenance of stability, and a desire to achieve unanimity in resolving divisive issues dominated as the standards for making decisions.<sup>189</sup> This arrangement produced a closed societal and political system with a strong inclination to reject outside influence. Inside this system, personal affiliation and an ad hoc balance of others' interests, as opposed to institutionalized political

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188 For the Russian case: I. Bremmer, "Who's in Charge in the Kremlin?" *World Policy Journal* 22, no. 4 (2005), 1. For the case of Chávez in Venezuela: G. Coronel, *Corruption, Mismanagement, and Abuse of Power in Hugo Chávez's Venezuela* (Cato Institute, Center for Global Liberty & Prosperity, 2006). Also: M. Shifter, "Slouching Toward Authoritarianism," *Foreign Affairs*, 7 November 2007.

189 E. L. Keenan, "Muscovite Political Folkways," *Russian Review* (1986), 115–181.

structure, determined political status and function.<sup>190</sup> Power and influence were conveyed by, and confined to, an individual's office or proximity to an office holder. For those firmly in control, change and progress represented the possibility of devaluation of political and social power.

While the above descriptions characterize the internal domestic political system, it is important to understand how that system relates to, and interacts with, the outside world. One interpretation is that the origin and evolution of Russian foreign policy can be understood by examining four persistent conditions: economic backwardness, permeable frontiers, a multicultural state and society, and cultural marginality.<sup>191</sup> From very early on, economic backwardness created a vulnerability to outside coercion where Russian foreign policy was concerned.<sup>192</sup> The second condition, the porous nature of Russia's perimeter borders, also presented severe problems for stability and external security, especially as "the power of the Russian state weakened as it moved from the center to the periphery."<sup>193</sup>

Russia's political system combined with these challenges to form a distinct paranoia that continued through the Soviet period in spite of the disappointment it brought. This disappointment of the Soviet period traced earlier disappointment of nineteenth century reforms that also resulted in a feeling of "betrayal" by the West. This myth of alleged betrayal generated an "us" versus "them" mentality and ideas of Russian superiority. More importantly, this myth was used to justify policy (both foreign and domestic) and was instrumental in creating an anti-Western identity. In carefully managing the paranoia by reviving the image of a strong "enemy" (the West), political leaders were able to call upon that anti-Western identity to strengthen their state during times of weakness.<sup>194</sup>

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190 Keenan, *Muscovite Political Folkways*.

191 A. J. Rieber, "Persistent Factors in Russian Foreign Policy: An Interpretive Essay," *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy* (1993), 315-322.

192 D. K. Reading, *The Anglo-Russian Commercial Treaty of 1734* (Yale University Press, 1938).

193 Rieber, *Persistent Factors in Russian Foreign Policy: An Interpretive Essay*.

194 T. Yevgeneva, "The Myth of the "West" in Russian Political Culture and its Impact on Foreign and Security Policy," *Studies in Contemporary History and Security Policy* 1 (1999), 59-70.

The Russian perception has consistently defaulted to identifying the West (or any other outside force) as hostile and confrontational toward Russian civilization and statehood.<sup>195</sup> This view continues to dominate the political reality of Russia today.<sup>196</sup> In the Russian mindset, the failure of IMF policies to reverse the economic implosion immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s served to confirm the accuracy of this view. The opening of Russia's backward economy under these policies created opportunity for foreign investors and economic disaster for Russia. Similarly, continued NATO expansion is perceived to cause security and stability dilemmas analogous to those faced by Russia previously. Russia's perception of itself and the international system is the product of a risk-averse, survivalist political system that has blurred the line between domestic and foreign policy for several hundred years.<sup>197</sup>

While perceptions and societal development have directly influenced Russian foreign and domestic policy for hundreds of years, the situation in Venezuela is much different. To begin, the development of Venezuela occurred in a much different fashion. Over the course of 1820–1830, Venezuela achieved and consolidated its independence from Spain.<sup>198</sup> Since Venezuela was settled by the Spanish, their culture and influence were inherent in Venezuelan society, and remain so today. Even the Monroe Doctrine, a document established in 1823, which outlined U.S. prerogative for intervention in Latin America on the basis of a European threat, predates complete consolidation of the Venezuelan state by several years.<sup>199</sup> In something of a paradox, Simon Bolívar, revered and continuously invoked by Chávez as a great leader of Latin American revolution, foresaw this type of policy assisting the Latin American cause. According to Bolívar, prosperity and development would occur “as soon as we are strong, under the auspices of a liberal nation that lends us its protection.”<sup>200</sup> Although Bolívar may have been

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195 T. Yevgeneva, "The Myth of the "West" in Russian Political Culture and its Impact on Foreign and Security Policy," *Studies in Contemporary History and Security Policy* 1 (1999), 59-70.

196 L. Shevtsova, "Imitation Russia," *The American Interest* (November/December 2006), 1-2.

197 Keenan, *Muscovite Political Folkways*.

198 Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*.

199 D. Perkins, *Hands Off: A History of the Monroe Doctrine* (Little, Brown and company, 1941).

200 J. A. Crow, *The Epic of Latin America* (University of California Press, 1992).

somewhat suspicious of U.S. power in preferring an alliance with the British to counterbalance the United States (similar to Chávez's pursuit of Russia to counterbalance the United States today), he recognized an unavoidable connection between the United States and Latin America. Obviously, events did not transpire according to Bolívar's vision. Instead, Latin American development has consistently lagged behind development of every other region of the world with the exception of Africa.<sup>201</sup>

Still, the origins of anti-U.S. or anti-Western perceptions affecting foreign policy did not really begin to appear until the middle of the twentieth century. Certainly, there were brief occasions during which policies were designed to resist U.S. control over the hemisphere, but widespread, active opposition to U.S. policies did not find a serious voice until the middle of the twentieth century. This opposition was predominately led by Fidel Castro in Cuba and other armed revolutionary movements elsewhere in Latin America.<sup>202</sup> These movements found support in the academic world, as "dependency theory" became popular. Dependency theory holds that development does not depend solely on stages, but also upon a state's "position within a single international economic structure of production and distribution. This presupposes, on the other hand, a defined structure of relations of domination."<sup>203</sup> Essentially, as Michael Reid points out, the theory argued that "poor countries are poor because others are rich", not because they "failed, for whatever other reason, to develop."<sup>204</sup>

Dependency theory grew to become very popular among Marxists, left-leaning scholars, and others in Latin America. As capitalism and foreign influence were popularly believed to be directly responsible for poverty and failure in Latin America,<sup>205</sup>

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201 According to GDP and comparative socio-economic indicators as found in: M. Reid, *Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America's Soul* (Yale University Press, 2007).

202 M. A. Waters, *The First and Second Declarations of Havana: Manifestos of Revolutionary Struggle in the Americas Adopted by the Cuban People* (Pathfinder Press, 2007).

203 F. H. Cardoso and E. Faletto, *Dependencia y Desarrollo* (Siglo, 2003). Cardoso conceded much later that he had been misinterpreted and that the problem was "political in nature rather than economic" and "backwardness was our own fault, not anybody else's." As found in: F. H. Cardoso, *The Accidental President of Brazil: A Memoir* (Public Affairs, 2006).

204 Reid, *Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America's Soul*.

205 André Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1967).

authors began to speak of U.S. Marines and IMF missions (among other things) as “agents of plunder.”<sup>206</sup> While these views did become a trendy academic explanation for Latin American underdevelopment, they were not manifest in the governmental policy of Venezuela. However, institutionalized changes in the Venezuelan armed forces, declining oil prices in the 1980s, and austerity measures initiated by then-President Carlos Perez opened the door for political upheaval that ultimately led to an unsuccessful coup attempt in 1992, led by Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez.<sup>207</sup> Among the officers who spearheaded the rebellion, collectively known as Movimiento Bolívariano Revolucionario 200 (MBR–200), most all were opposed to neoliberal economic policies, distrustful of foreign influence, and equated privatization of Venezuela’s state-owned industries to a loss of sovereignty and security.<sup>208</sup> This group, and more importantly their views, made a comeback in the elections of 1998 when Hugo Chávez was elected President. Since that time, Venezuela’s perception of the international system has been synonymous with Chávez’s views.

## **2. Evolution of Perceptions**

Without a doubt, the most publicized feature of Venezuela’s foreign policy under Chávez is its growing distance from the United States and its allies.<sup>209</sup> Prior to Chávez, relations between the United States and Venezuela were relatively cordial and mutually beneficial. Clearly, the decision to move Venezuela away from the United States was inspired by his legendary distrust of foreign influence and neoliberal economic policies.<sup>210</sup> What the U.S. government is (identity), and what it does (policy), as perceived by Chávez, remain inconsistent with what is necessary for Venezuela.<sup>211</sup> For

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206 E. Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America* (Monthly Review Press New York, 1997).

207 H. A. Trinkunas, "The Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations: From Punto Fijo to the Fifth Republic," *Latin American Research Review* 37, no. 1 (2002), 41-76.

208 Ibid.

209 McCoy and Myers, *The Unraveling of Representative Democracy in Venezuela*.

210 Kozloff, *Hugo Chávez: Oil, Politics, and the Challenge to the U.S..*

211 C. Sojo, "Venezuela's Chávez Accuses U.S. Government of Considering His Assassination," *venezuelanalysis.com* (online), 25 February 2005. <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/951> (accessed 18 March 2009).

some, the decision to increase the diplomatic divide between the United States and Venezuela could be attributed to lack of U.S. condemnation for the coup that sought to remove Chávez from power, U.S. refusal to continue selling Venezuela military hardware, or any number of other factors exogenous to the Venezuelan domestic political system.<sup>212</sup> From this perspective, U.S. decisions of this type caused cooperation with the United States to be less beneficial for Venezuela and thus contributed to an anti-U.S. agenda, as incentives are insufficient and cooperation is antithetical to the goals of Venezuelan policy.<sup>213</sup>

Such a conclusion, however, is insufficient as a singular explanation for why the United States and Venezuela have drifted further apart. The fact is that the beliefs and world views of Chávez have contributed just as much to the distancing between the United States and Venezuela.<sup>214</sup> As a self-proclaimed Maoist and devout advocate for socialism, his preference for international multipolarity, increased role of government, and centralization of economic and political matters inherently placed him at odds with the United States under the administration of George W. Bush.<sup>215</sup> This difference of views manifested itself in Venezuela's "vehement denunciation" of the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), which was described as "limiting the ability of the

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212 Leogrande infers silent U.S. support for the 2002 coup against Chávez in: W. M. Leogrande, "A Poverty of Imagination: George W. Bush's Policy in Latin America," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39, no. 02 (2007), 355-385. See also: J. Figueiredo, "U.S. Foreign Policy in Latin America: Time for a Change," *Orbis* 51, no. 4 (2007), 697-709. See also: Moisés Naím, "Missing Links: A Venezuelan Paradox," *Foreign Policy*, no. 135 (March-April 2003), 95-96.

213 Generalities in: A. Acharya and A. I. Johnston, *Crafting Cooperation: Regional International Institutions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2007). Specific aspects of Venezuela discussed in: K. A. Peterson, *Implications of China's Growing Demand for Oil: A Case Study in Venezuela*. Also in: S. R. Allen, "Soft Means and Hard Ends: Assessing Hugo Chávez's Efforts to Counter United States Preponderance" Masters Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School (2007).

214 J. P. Zuquete, "The Missionary Politics of Hugo Chávez," *Latin American Politics and Society* 50, no. 1 (2008), 91-121. See also: J. M. Post, "'El Fenomeno Chávez': Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, Modern Day Bolívar." *Counterproliferation Papers* 39, USAF Counterproliferation Center, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL, 2007.

215 H. Chávez, *The South also Exists* (LeftWord Books, 2005). See also: Johnson and others, *What a Chávez Win Means in Venezuela and for U.S. Policy*.

state to design and execute policies” on behalf of its people.<sup>216</sup> Additionally, while somewhat melodramatic, Chávez’s phobia of U.S. engagement with Latin America, and especially with Colombia, has motivated him to tirelessly promote cooperation with Russia.<sup>217</sup> This political cooperation has been sealed with state-controlled business in direct accordance with the Chávez model for what the state should do.<sup>218</sup> These are but two examples of a consistent clash between Chávez and the United States. Given the personal views of Chávez and the overwhelming reflection of those views in the Venezuelan government, it is difficult to envision a scenario that could have facilitated both the Chávez rise to power and continued success of the U.S.–Venezuelan relationship as it existed prior to his Presidency.

Chavismo’s effect on Venezuelan foreign policy is clearly a factor endogenous to the Venezuelan domestic political system. The intensity of the Chávez administration’s world views causes increased cooperation with the United States to be virtually impossible without wholesale changes to U.S. foreign and domestic policy.<sup>219</sup> Chávez makes no secret of Venezuela’s goals to establish itself as an alternative for the Latin American region.<sup>220</sup> The push to oppose U.S. policy in the Latin American region and around the world is not just inferred by state actions, but is actually a proclaimed goal about which Chávez boasts.<sup>221</sup> Outside of the very necessary oil exports to the United States, there is remarkable correlation and consistency between Venezuelan actions and

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216 T. Arreaza, “ALBA: Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean,” Amigos de Cuba, Vancouver, BC, 30 January 2004.  
<http://www.amigosdecubacanada.com/images/Alba%20vs%20FTAA%20bookletfinal.pdf> (accessed 22 January 2009).

217 Marquez, Venezuela-Russia: Business Deals Consolidate Alliance.

218 Ibid. Also: Arreaza, ALBA: Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean.

219 Changes to which Chávez has alluded as found in: D. P. Erikson, “Obama & Latin America: Magic or Realism?” World Policy Journal 25, no. 4 (2009), 101-107. Also in: D. Cancel, “Chávez Tells Obama He should Follow Venezuela’s Socialist Path,” Bloomberg.com (online), 6 March 2009.  
[http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=aB6yw1ihGZ2k&refer=latin\\_america](http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=aB6yw1ihGZ2k&refer=latin_america) (accessed 18 March 2009).

220 Arreaza, ALBA: Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean. See also: E. Lander, “Venezuelan Social Conflict in a Global Context,” Latin American Perspectives 32, no. 2 (March 2005).

221 Chávez, The South also Exists. See also: D. Schoen and M. Rowan, The Threat Closer to Home: Hugo Chávez and the War against America (Free Press, 2009).

its stated goals on the international stage. The same message has been broadcast by Chávez from the very outset, and it is unlikely to change any time soon. All rhetoric aside, however, the international actions of Chávez have specifically targeted the U.S. role in Latin America (and elsewhere), promotion of Venezuela as a regional leader (if not global), and the spread of socialism throughout Latin America.<sup>222</sup>

Any explanation of Venezuelan foreign policy must reflect the profound impact of Chávez's world views and perceptions of the international system. While there is some political opposition, Chávez has been able to leverage the state and its resources multiple times to turn political setbacks into eventual triumph.<sup>223</sup> The recent referendum victory ending Presidential term limits, the victory in the recall referendum in 2004, and the initial rewrite of the Constitution are all examples.<sup>224</sup> Just when the political opposition gains a foothold, the resiliency of Chávez policies is demonstrated by their electoral success. It is not foreign or domestic policy that matter in the Venezuelan political system, but rather Chávez policy.<sup>225</sup> In the Venezuelan case, the increased level of centralized control without realistically strong checks or balances has caused Venezuela's domestic and foreign policy to converge. Indeed, Chávez is keen to remind us that defense of the Bolívarian revolution is the ultimate goal<sup>226</sup> and its supranational character requires subordination of domestic considerations, possibly even their removal.<sup>227</sup> Venezuela's foreign policy goals have become indivisible from the goals of

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222 Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home: Hugo Chávez and the War against America*.

223 Ellner, *The Contrasting Variants of the Populism of Hugo Chávez and Alberto Fujimori*. See also: Post, "El Fenomeno Chávez": Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, Modern Day Bolivar. See also: S. Romero, "Timely Reversals show Chávez's Political Instincts," *International Herald Tribune* (online), 10 June 2008. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/06/10/america/venez.php> (accessed 18 March 2009).

224 J. L. McCoy, "The 2004 Venezuelan Recall Referendum," *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 1 (2006), 61-79. See also: Johnson and others, *What a Chávez Win Means in Venezuela and for U.S. Policy*. See also: S. Romero, "Chávez Wins Referendum to End Term Limits," *International Herald Tribune* (online), 16 February 2009. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2009/02/16/america/venez.php> (accessed 18 March 2009).

225 Venezuela under Chávez, Strategic Comments. See also: C. Carlson, "Chávez's Referendum Victory," *SocialistWorker.org* (online), 25 February 2009. <http://socialistworker.org/2009/02/25/chavez-referendum-victory> (accessed 18 March 2009).

226 Politicizing, renaming, and subordinating Venezuelan armed forces described in: Caribbean and Latin America, *The Military Balance*, 2008.

227 Yanes, *The Cuba-Venezuela Alliance: "Emancipatory Neo-Bolivarismo" or Totalitarian Expansion?*

Chávez as they are formed from his world view: a multipolar world, Venezuelan leadership in Latin America, opposition to neoliberal economics, and promotion of the Bolívarian revolution.<sup>228</sup>

Just as Venezuela has turned away from the United States, Russia has gradually done the same. However, this gradual distancing is less a result of anti-U.S. sentiment or personal resentment between leaders of state. The currently cool relationship between Russia and the United States is more likely an indicator of Russian discomfort with U.S. foreign policy, particularly where Russia's near abroad is concerned.<sup>229</sup> The truth is that Russia would very much prefer to work with the United States on a number of issues. The recent Russian handling of the situation regarding the U.S. base in Kyrgyzstan is an example of Russian desire to sit across the table from the United States and once more negotiate global matters of real importance.<sup>230</sup> This ability would reinforce Moscow's self-perceived role as a heavyweight player on the international scene. The desperation to engage in superpower relations is not limited to U.S. involvement in Russia's near abroad, but is equally palpable in other areas of contention, such as U.S. planned missile defense, the conflict with Georgia, independence for Kosovo, nuclear arms agreements (as well as conventional), and several others.<sup>231</sup>

The preference for negotiations with the United States in these areas is not motivated singularly by the psychological, or ideational, aspect. While such a forum would perhaps be observed by some as Russia's resurgence in a global leadership role, there is a pragmatic reason, as well. Considering the extent to which the United States is politically and militarily extended in the war in Afghanistan and elsewhere, there is no

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228 C. E. Wilson, "The Bolivarian Revolution According to Hugo Chávez," *Orbis* 52, no. 3 (2008), 523-537.

229 S. F. Cohen, "The New American Cold War," *The Nation* 17, no. 2006 (2006), 1-9. See also: D. Trenin, "Russia Leaves the West," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 4 (2006), 87-96.

230 T. Lasseter, "Russia Outmaneuvered U.S. Over Air Base, Analysts Say," [mcclatchydc.com](http://www.mcclatchydc.com) (online), 5 March 2009. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/117/story/63357.html> (accessed 18 March 2009). See also: "U.S.A. Loses Air Base in Kyrgyzstan to Russia," *Pravda.Ru* (online), 4 February 2009. [http://english.pravda.ru/world/ussr/04-02-2009/107058-usa\\_kyrgyzstan\\_russia-0](http://english.pravda.ru/world/ussr/04-02-2009/107058-usa_kyrgyzstan_russia-0) (accessed 18 March 2009).

231 S. Pifer, "Reversing the Decline: An Agenda for U.S.-Russian Relations in 2009," Policy Paper Number 10, Foreign Policy at Brookings, January 2009. [http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/01\\_us\\_russia\\_relations\\_pifer.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/01_us_russia_relations_pifer.aspx) (accessed 18 March 2009).

better opportunity than the present for Russia to be involved in negotiations with the United States.<sup>232</sup> The United States finally needs something from Russia and will have to pay dearly for it, once Central Asian alternatives have been explored, exhausted, or taken away. Not only will the United States be under pressure to make headway on Afghanistan, it will enter any such negotiations with a foreign policy team that has very little time in office, far less, in fact, than their Russian counterparts.<sup>233</sup> Recent signals by Washington's administration clearly convey the message that the United States is prepared to negotiate these global matters once more, and this time on Russia's terms.<sup>234</sup> If the negotiations are successful, the pragmatic aspect of Russia's current foreign policy will be as satisfying as the psychological comfort Russia would receive if it successfully recovered great power status.<sup>235</sup>

While Russian foreign policy is informed by a distrust of outsiders, particularly the West, and while it is assertive in its near abroad, it does not directly confront the United States or other Western countries.<sup>236</sup> There is no shortage of expressed Russian support for a multipolar world, but Russian policy does not hold its achievement as an imperative for the international community.<sup>237</sup> In other words, in a departure from what is often repeated, Russia's policy actions are not aimed at instilling multipolarity. Instead, it acts as it sees fit in each situation. While Russia opposed the independence of

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232 Lasseter, Russia Outmaneuvered U.S. Over Air Base, Analysts Say. See also: W. J. Perry, The U.S. Military under Strain and at Risk (National Security Advisory Group, 2006).

233 H. Cooper, "Obama's War—Fearing another Quagmire in Afghanistan," The New York Times, 24 January 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/weekinreview/25cooper.html> (accessed 19 March 2009).

234 "Obama's Outreach to Adversaries Takes Unexpected Turn with Taliban Approach," FOXnews.com (online), 9 March 2009. <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/first100days/2009/03/09/talk-taliban-outreach-obama-makes-court-press/> (accessed 19 March 2009). See also: L. Kim, "Russia Lays out Nuclear Arms Position After 'Reset' with U.S.," bloomberg.com (online), 7 March 2009. [http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601103&sid=aq2nG\\_1h6IFo&refer=us](http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601103&sid=aq2nG_1h6IFo&refer=us) (accessed 19 March 2009). See also: "NATO Woos Russia on Afghanistan," BBC News (online), 5 March 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7925944.stm> (accessed 21 March 2009).

235 Pifer, Reversing the Decline: An Agenda for U.S.-Russian Relations in 2009.

236 D. Trenin, Russia Redefines itself and its Relations with the West. See also: Kubicek, Russian Foreign Policy and the West.

237 Kubicek, Russian Foreign Policy and the West. See also: S. Cavan, "Russia's Multipolar Disorder," Institute for the Study of Conflict, Ideology, and Policy (ISCIP), 24 November 2009. <http://www.bu.edu/phpbin/news-cms/news/?dept=732&id=51524> (accessed 19 March 2009).

Kosovo, it was quick to recognize the independence of Abkhazia.<sup>238</sup> Russian foreign policy goals are directed toward achieving what is best for Russia, as interpreted by its leaders.<sup>239</sup> There are a great number of countries with which Russia is willing to work, virtually any country, in fact. However, this does not mean that Russia is a champion of integrating with other states. Rather, it lays bare Russia's effective use of dual diplomacy that employs one set of rules to accommodate interaction with Iran (for example) and a different set of tenets when dealing with the United States.<sup>240</sup>

Russian foreign policy today is far more sophisticated than was Soviet foreign policy. Russia has managed to learn very quickly how to interact with other nations in order to achieve the goals of its foreign policy.<sup>241</sup> This is a departure from Soviet policy that favored a combination of coercion, bribery, or hints in its attempts to secure and maintain foreign policy goals.<sup>242</sup> As much of an improvement as this increased astuteness may be, it is important to remain aware of the fact that the world views and beliefs of those who make foreign policy may not have progressed as rapidly. Russia's foreign policy goals serve as a testament to this scenario. While it has managed to expand its repertoire of methodology in pursuit of foreign policy goals, the goals

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238 M. S. Roy, "The Russian-Georgian Conflict: Growing Uncertainties in the Caucasus and Central Asia," *Strategic Analysis* 33, no. 1 (2009), 13-18. See also: D. L. Phillips, "Russia: Abkhazia is Not Kosovo," *Transitions Online*, CEEOL, 12 February 2008.

239 Cavan, Russia's Multipolar Disorder. See also: Trenin, Russia Leaves the West.

240 M. Light, "Russia in a Multipolar World: Russian Independent Media on Putin's Visit to Iran," *World Politics Review*, 26 October 2007. <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/Article.aspx?id=1273> (accessed 2 February 2009).

241 I. S. Ivanov, *The New Russian Diplomacy* (Brookings Institution Press, 2002).

242 Ibid. See also: A. Ulam, "Soviet Diplomacy: Bluffing," *The New York Times*, 28 June 1981. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C01E0D91138F93BA15755C0A967948260> (accessed 19 March 2009).

themselves have changed little.<sup>243</sup> Other than the obligatory mention of human rights and internationalism, the priorities remain very similar to those crafted by President Putin in 2000: strengthening of security, international economic relations, and “effective means of international influence on the public opinion abroad.”<sup>244</sup>

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243 R. H. Donaldson and J. L. Nogee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests* (Mesharpe, 2005).

244 V. Putin, "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," fas.org (online), 28 June 2000. <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm> (accessed 9 March 2009).

## **IV. ASSESSING THE FUTURE OF RUSSIAN–VENEZUELAN RELATIONS: REACTIVE AND STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS**

Chávez’s anti–U.S. rhetoric and Russia’s occasional saber rattling with the United States point to the fact that Russian and Venezuelan policy goals are designed with the United States in mind. Policies put into play must be demonstrably independent from U.S. influence. Given this, U.S. opinion and action are central to understanding Russia and Venezuela, as the policies, attitudes, and rhetoric of both are a specifically designed reaction to the United States. Analyzing U.S. interaction with both countries is crucial for comprehension of Russian and Venezuelan policy motivation.

An understanding of how Russia and Venezuela function on the international stage reveals the strategic aims of their relationship. While the relationship is immediately and superficially beneficial for both parties, many developments are underway that inextricably link success or failure of policies of both sides to the relationship. The level of investment by both countries has reached the point that the leaders of both sides are mortgaging their political future (and that of their countries) on the relationship’s success. There remain several possibilities for tensions to arise between Russia and Venezuela, but the benefits for both provide sufficient incentives for continued cooperation. Only a shift from the status quo by Russia or Venezuela, in either the relationship or on the international scene, is likely to upset the balance and lead to the relationship’s demise.

### **A. THE U.S. ROLE—THE AMBIVALENT PROTAGONIST**

The recurring theme used by Russia and Venezuela to provide context for their relationship is that of “multipolarity.” A multipolar world, more clearly defined as a world in which capabilities (between states) are equally distributed,<sup>245</sup> is the goal toward

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245 Nye, Neorealism and Neoliberalism.

which each country is striving.<sup>246</sup> A view of the United States as the world's hegemonic power is central to the Venezuelan and Russian understanding of the international system. As a result, the shared relationship between the two is influenced by, and directed against, the role of the United States as a unipolar force in international relations. In this way, U.S. actions play a crucially catalytic role to which Venezuela and Russia collectively react. Analysis of the relationship is not possible without consideration of how they are influenced by U.S. policy and international action, especially as it concerns both Russian and Venezuelan national interests.

### **1. Reorientation of Efforts, Redefinition of Interests after 11 September**

The terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001 created massive change in American foreign policy. Prior to 11 September 2001, the foreign policy of the United States operated in support of an entirely different paradigm.<sup>247</sup> With the attack on America on 11 September, American interests were redefined and efforts were reoriented, just as they were after the attack on Pearl Harbor.<sup>248</sup> Following the attacks, the Bush administration, somewhat coincidentally, adopted the foreign policy promoted by his opponent, Al Gore, during the general election. This policy advocated that the United States as the "natural leader" of the world should provide others the "blueprint that will help others be like us more."<sup>249</sup> Preemptive action in support of national interests (particularly security interests) of the United States and democracy promotion became the motivating forces behind foreign policy after 2001.

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<sup>246</sup> H. A. Trinkunas, "What is Really New About Venezuela's Bolivarian Foreign Policy?" *Strategic Insights* V, no. 2 (February 2006). See also: T. Ambrosio, *Challenging America's Global Preeminence: Russia's Quest for Multipolarity* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2005).

<sup>247</sup> R. Kagan, "The September 12 Paradigm," *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2008).

<sup>248</sup> I. Parmar, "Catalysing Events, Think Tanks and American Foreign Policy Shifts: A Comparative Analysis of the Impacts of Pearl Harbor 1941 and 11 September 2001," *Government and Opposition* 40, no. 1 (2005), 1-25.

<sup>249</sup> Kagan, The September 12 Paradigm.

As the U.S. government carried out its fight against terrorism and the subsequent war in Iraq, other policy aspects were neglected. One of the largest areas of neglect, which resulted from the policy shift, was that of U.S. policy toward Latin America. In the first several months of his Presidency, President Bush indicated the U.S. relationship with Mexico was one of the most important relationships for the United States.<sup>250</sup> However, although some successes were achieved in Latin America, experts acknowledge the United States should have paid more attention to the region considering its huge energy resources and economic expansion.<sup>251</sup> The Bush administration's policy toward Latin America was in many ways typical of every other administration's policy. Latin American expectations for improvement in relations with the United States are very high during U.S. Presidential campaigns. Unfortunately, the results generated over the subsequent four to eight year terms are generally disappointing.<sup>252</sup>

The significance of the Bush administration's lack of attention toward Latin America is derived from the rise of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and his anti-U.S. influence on smaller countries in the region, most notably Cuba, Bolivia, and Nicaragua. While many scold the Bush administration's handling of Latin America, there is no evidence that guarantees an all-out diplomatic effort geared toward Latin America would have yielded a better situation than currently exists between the United States and Latin America. In fact, given the happenings of 2001, it is generally conceded that an alternative to Bush would likely have shifted policy away from Latin America in much the same manner.<sup>253</sup> There is ample evidence to demonstrate that the mood of the U.S.

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250 T. Cohen, "Canadians Feeling Ignored by Bush," San Antonio Express-News, sec. A9, 09 September 2001. [http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p\\_product=SAEC&p\\_theme=saec&p\\_action=search&p\\_maxdocs=200&p\\_topdoc=1&p\\_text\\_direct-0=0EE752CCB3095970&p\\_field\\_direct-0=document\\_id&p\\_perpage=10&p\\_sort=YMD\\_date:D&s\\_trackval=GooglePM](http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p_product=SAEC&p_theme=saec&p_action=search&p_maxdocs=200&p_topdoc=1&p_text_direct-0=0EE752CCB3095970&p_field_direct-0=document_id&p_perpage=10&p_sort=YMD_date:D&s_trackval=GooglePM) (accessed 9 February 2009). See also: Hakim, Is Washington Losing Latin America?

251 N. Retamal, "U.S. Leaves Latin America on the Back Burner, Says DeShazo," The Santiago Times, 10 October 2008. [http://209.85.173.132/search?q=cache:woBsAoP0tBkJ:www.santiagotimes.cl/santiagotimes/index2.php?option=com\\_content&do\\_pdf=1&id=14837+latin+america+US+back+burner&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=2&gl=us&client=firefox-a](http://209.85.173.132/search?q=cache:woBsAoP0tBkJ:www.santiagotimes.cl/santiagotimes/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=14837+latin+america+US+back+burner&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=2&gl=us&client=firefox-a) (accessed 9 February 2009).

252 Erikson, Obama & Latin America: Magic or Realism?

253 Retamal, U.S. Leaves Latin America on the Back Burner, Says DeShazo.

government became far more hawkish in the aftermath of the attacks,<sup>254</sup> and Latin America simply was not on the minds of U.S. policymakers until after the effects of their new policies (or lack thereof) were felt abroad. While U.S.–Latin American relations have seemingly followed the same ‘hope to disappointment’ pattern as under previous administrations,<sup>255</sup> their poor condition is exacerbated and utilized by Hugo Chávez who has emerged as an influential force dedicated to leading the region away from ties with the United States.

The same phenomenon occurred with U.S.–Russian relations. Since the outbreak of the Global War on Terror, which the United States began to fight shortly after 11 September 2001, U.S. responses and actions have consistently opposed Russian desires and preferences where the two countries have been concerned. NATO expansion and U.S. departure from arms control and other international agreements are the examples previously mentioned that serve to demonstrate the large divide between U.S. and Russian positions.<sup>256</sup> As the United States pursued its national interests under the Bush administration after 11 September 2001, it extended its reach into Central Asia by way of establishing bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. While President Putin initially provided his approval (whether or not it was necessary remains a subject of debate), eventually concern arose over the fact that Russia no longer exercised “sole influence” in their “legitimate sphere of interest.”<sup>257</sup>

In short, the terrorist attacks that occurred on 11 September 2001 dramatically created an about face for a U.S. foreign policy that was previously intent on ensuring the United States would not “go around the world and say this is the way it’s got to be.”<sup>258</sup> Pursuit of the new, more active foreign policy began to create problems between the

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254 K. T. Poole, "Changing Minds? Not in Congress!" *Public Choice* 131, no. 3 (2007), 435-451.

255 Erikson, Obama & Latin America: Magic or Realism?

256 Information related to NATO expansion and U.S. abstention from continued arms control efforts are found in III.A.2. (footnotes 175-181).

257 M. Light, "Russian-American Relations under George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 19, no. 1 (2008), 25-32.

258 Former President Bush's response during a Presidential debate when asked what principles should guide U.S. policy. Found in: Kagan, *The September 12 Paradigm*.

United States and other international players. While the United States sought to secure its national interests, these interests came into conflict with interests of other countries. The United States focused intently on rectifying the situation that had enabled the terrorist attacks while the remainder of the world focused on economic issues and their own regional security issues. The conviction with which the United States pursued the war on terror, coupled with a gross overestimation of international support for the effort, produced an overly myopic, security-focused foreign policy that was unable to maintain relationships with countries whose interests were at odds with those of the United States.<sup>259</sup>

## **2. U.S. Handling of Venezuela**

U.S. opinion regarding the Chávez regime plainly demonstrates the fact that the United States would prefer different leadership in Venezuela. The initial years of Venezuela under Chávez were marked by U.S. frustration and irritation.<sup>260</sup> The most telling sign of the U.S. preference for a Chávez alternative in Venezuela can be found by examining U.S. reaction to the April 2002 coup attempt carried out by Chávez's political opposition. Although the U.S. response to the series of events is somewhat disputed, an independent task force focused on U.S. policy toward Latin America has characterized the U.S. administration as "having seemingly endorsed" the military coup.<sup>261</sup> Indeed, the U.S. handling of the situation has been described in some circles as evidence that U.S. disdain for Chávez was so strong that it affected U.S. "commitment to democratic institutions."<sup>262</sup> The Bush administration immediately acknowledged the new government formed after Chavez's ouster, an action that violated the U.S. commitment to regional accords calling for the immediate denunciation of undemocratic changes in

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259 C. Conetta, *Losing Hearts and Minds: World Public Opinion and Post-9/11 U.S. Security Policy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Commonwealth Institute, 2006), 1-8.

260 J. G. Castaneda, "The Forgotten Relationship" *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 3 (2003), 67-81.

261 C. Barshefsky and J. T. Hill, "U.S. Policy Toward Latin America: Report of an Independent Task Force," Council on Foreign Relations Press, (2008).

262 M. R. Cleary, "Explaining the Left's Resurgence," *Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 4 (2006), 35.

government.<sup>263</sup> As expected, the ensuing reaction from Latin American countries, and Venezuela in particular, was one of strong condemnation. While this incident sparked the flames of anti-U.S. sentiment and rhetoric abroad, it led to a lack of U.S. engagement with Chávez, Venezuela, and Latin America, in general. The coup against the Chávez regime, along with emerging post-11 September U.S. security priorities (Afghanistan and Iraq) toward the end of 2002, dramatically distanced the United States from Venezuela and Latin America.<sup>264</sup>

Since then, U.S. response to policies of the Chávez administration has been very subdued. While the Bush administration was dissatisfied with many of Chávez's policies following the coup attempt, it maintained a 'wait and see' approach. U.S. reaction to a second attempted coup in December 2002 and the oil workers' strike was clearly muted and did not overtly demonstrate preferences of the Bush administration.<sup>265</sup> Curiously, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, Thomas Shannon, indicated in October 2008 that the weapons acquired by Venezuela did not represent a threat as a threat involves doctrine, training, capacity."<sup>266</sup> This is a distinct departure in tone from previous U.S. reaction concerning Venezuelan arms purchases that, as outlined earlier, included active diplomatic efforts to stop Venezuelan purchases<sup>267</sup> and expressions of concern.<sup>268</sup>

The attitude projected by the U.S. government toward Venezuelan affairs has become increasingly ambivalent when Venezuela alone is the topic of discussion (as we will see, this is not necessarily the case where Venezuela and other states are concerned). Perhaps this is a natural response to the psychological realization that there is little that the United States can do to influence Venezuela, or perhaps it is designed to avoid

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263 Cleary, Explaining the Left's Resurgence.

264 Hakim, Is Washington Losing Latin America?

265 McCoy and Myers, The Unraveling of Representative Democracy in Venezuela.

266 M. Kellerhalls, Jr., "Russian Overtures to Venezuela Not a Threat, U.S. Official Says," *america.gov* (online), 20 October 2008. <http://www.america.gov/st/peacesec-english/2008/October/20081020150354dmsslahrellek0.3442041.html> (accessed 26 January 2009).

267 "Venezuela Rebuffs U.S. on Arms Deals," *Washington Post*, sec. A15, The *Washington Post Company*, 12 February 2005 (accessed 5 February 2009).

268 P. Markey, "Venezuela Signs 1.56 Bln Military Deal with Spain," *Malaysia Star* (Online), 28 November 2005. [http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2005/11/29/worldupdates/2005-11-28T234115Z\\_01\\_NOOTR\\_RTRJONC\\_0\\_-225372-1&sec=Worldupdates](http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2005/11/29/worldupdates/2005-11-28T234115Z_01_NOOTR_RTRJONC_0_-225372-1&sec=Worldupdates) (accessed 5 February 2009).

providing Chávez a pulpit for promulgating anti-U.S. discourse. For whatever reason, U.S. statements have focused on concern for democratic institutions inside Venezuela and for countries Chávez has successfully influenced. While this concern has been clearly expressed, there is little public reaction or discussion emanating from Washington regarding specific Venezuela's foreign policy goals.<sup>269</sup> Instead, Chávez is painted as a non-specific threat to the region. In general, the United States can be described as having carefully handled Venezuela from a distance since the restoration of Chávez to power following the attempted coup in April 2002.<sup>270</sup>

### **3. U.S. Handling of Russia**

The West, and particularly the United States, was intent on assisting Russia (as defined by the United States) as it emerged from communism. However, the mechanisms utilized by the Clinton administration and its successor were ultimately counterproductive for positive relations between the two countries. While the International Monetary Fund (IMF) pumped billions of dollars in assistance into Russia following its abandonment of communism, the United States inadvertently took advantage of Russia's weakness. Considering the new geopolitical reality, the Clinton administration worked to obtain as much as possible for the United States "politically, economically, and in terms of security" (NATO expansion) before Russia could complete its transition.<sup>271</sup> The failure of IMF assistance to provide relief and the eventual failure of privatization to bring economic wellbeing, as expected by many in Russia, due to corruption and self-dealing began to create Russian animosity toward the United States and its policies.<sup>272</sup>

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269 N. Pearson, "Venezuela Rejects U.S. Official's Remarks," Washington Post (Online), 31 January 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/31/AR2007013100150.html> (accessed 5 February 2009).

270 S. Holland, "Bush Avoids Direct Battle with Venezuela's Chávez," swissinfo.ch (online), 05 November 2005. <http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/index.html?siteSect=143&sid=6217239&cKey=1131233723000> (accessed 25 May 2009).

271 Simes, *Losing Russia*.

272 B. S. Black, R. Kraakman and A. S. Tarassova, "Russian Privatization and Corporate Governance: What Went Wrong?" *Ekonomski Analisi* 44, no. 147-148 (2000), 29-117.

Under the Bush administration, the United States continued to expand NATO,<sup>273</sup> walked away from certain arms agreements with Russia,<sup>274</sup> and began to perceive (and even more importantly, to publicly identify) Russia as a nondemocratic state.<sup>275</sup> In fact, key U.S. political figures, most notably Senator John McCain, charged President Putin with staging a coup to consolidate autocratic rule.<sup>276</sup> Meanwhile, NATO entertained the desires of both the Ukraine and Georgia to become members of the alliance, the former instance occurring in spite of the Ukrainian majority's opposition to the move.<sup>277</sup> In addition to granting candidate NATO membership to Georgia, the United States actively backed Georgia in its ethnic civil wars with separatists who are supported by Russia.<sup>278</sup> The U.S. decision to leave the ABM treaty was made as a result of the U.S. view that it had become irrelevant.<sup>279</sup> In each of these three examples, the United States acted in direct opposition to what Russia had defined as its interests. The logic motivating these U.S. decisions was contradictory. On one hand, the United States claimed the ABM treaty was no longer necessary, as mutual nuclear deterrence no longer existed; on the other hand, the United States worked to ensure Russia did not resort to its geopolitical positions of old.

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273 G. Hart and G. Humphrey, "Creating a Cold Peace by Expanding NATO," *Occupational Hazards*, CATO institute (20 March 1998).

274 H. Blix, "U.S. Holds Key to Non-Proliferation," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (2007), 27-30.

275 Trenin, *Russia Leaves the West*.

276 D. Treisman, "Is Russia's Experiment with Democracy Over?" UCLA International Institute (online), 29 October 2004. <http://www.international.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=16294> (accessed 5 February 2009).

277 D. Morgan, "U.S. Urges Ukraine NATO Membership, Action Unlikely," *Reuters*, 11 November 2008. <http://www.reuters.com/article/vcCandidateFeed2/idUSN11530324> (accessed 9 February 2009).

278 A. Lieven, "Why are we Trying to Reheat the Cold War?" *Los Angeles Times*, 19 March 2006. <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/mar/19/opinion/op-lieven19> (accessed 5 February 2009).

279 J. Stocker, "Nuclear Non-Proliferation," *Adelphi Papers* 46, no. 386 (2006), 61-68.

While the relationship between the United States and Russia started off well at the beginning of the first decade of this century, with the passage of time the two countries drifted further apart. The relationship between Russia and America during this period was almost entirely predicated upon the personal relationship between Presidents Bush and Putin, the blossoming of which occurred simultaneous with the start of Russia's relationship with Venezuela. The promising friendship between Bush and Putin soon gave way to different realities. While Russia pursued a foreign policy that focused on sovereignty and independence under Putin, the Bush administration embarked on a foreign policy that espoused action to deter future attacks and enact regime change.<sup>280</sup> These two types of policies obviously ran counter to each other and made it difficult for Russia and the United States to find themselves on the same side of many issues. Not surprisingly, as the two countries drifted further apart, the Bush administration faced increased pressure to "reevaluate" the "blank check policy" toward Russia and take a firmer stand against Russia.<sup>281</sup> If Presidents Bush and Putin did, in fact, share a deep personal connection, it clearly did not carry over into their stewardship of their respective countries.

American responses to increasingly assertive Russian international actions over the past few years have been notably restrained. Russia's intervention into Georgia in August 2008 motivated the United States to send ships and airplanes filled with humanitarian supplies, but the Bush administration took great care to avoid direct support of the Georgian military in any way.<sup>282</sup> While any response with a military form would perhaps have been considered reckless by the international community, it is noteworthy that Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili criticized the United States for not doing enough to help.<sup>283</sup> In February 2009, the U.S. State Department called Russian plans to establish military bases in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia

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280 Light, Russia in a Multipolar World: Russian Independent Media on Putin's Visit to Iran.

281 R. Holbrooke, "The End of the Romance," The Washington Post, sec. A19, The Washington Post Company, 16 February 2005.

282 D. Eggen and K. DeYoung, "After Warnings to Moscow, U.S. has Few Options," Washington Post, sec. A11, The Washington Post Company, 14 August 2008. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/13/AR2008081303752\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/13/AR2008081303752_pf.html) (accessed 9 February 2009).

283 Ibid.

regrettable, but did not express intentions to engage the international community or Russia itself concerning the alleged “violation of [Georgian] sovereignty.”<sup>284</sup> In that same month, the United States refused to acknowledge Moscow’s hand in forcing negotiations with Russia for overland and over flight permissions critical to providing supplies to ongoing efforts in Afghanistan.<sup>285</sup> As Russia has transitioned from an extremely weak state in the 1990s to a much more powerful international player in today’s world, the United States has transitioned from expanding (NATO) at Russia’s expense to maintaining the status quo. U.S. responses over the past few months (that have produced little to no effect on Russian policy) have been relatively quiet, notwithstanding rhetoric necessary to stake out an opposing position.

#### **4. U.S. Governmental Commentary on the Russian–Venezuelan Relationship**

One of the more interesting aspects of the period, which facilitated the growth of the Russian–Venezuelan relationship, is the U.S. government’s apparent lack of concern for its development. Official U.S. government remarks made throughout the course of the relationship’s development commented on Russia and Venezuela individually, never directly addressing the notion of any sort of an alliance having been formed between the two. There are ample references illustrating the displeasure with which the U.S. government views the sale of weapons to Venezuela<sup>286</sup> and other issues, but hindsight demonstrates that the U.S. government clearly does not believe the Russian–Venezuelan relationship is a legitimate force in the international arena. In responding to reporters’ questions regarding the deployment of Russian ships to Venezuela in the fall of 2008, a

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284 C. Doering, "U.S. Regrets Russia Plan for Bases in Georgia Regions," Reuters (Online), 6 February 2009. <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSN06482295> (accessed 9 February 2009).

285 "U.S. Military Supplies Allowed through Russia," The Moscow Times (online), 8 February 2009. <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/600/42/374358.htm> (accessed 9 February 2009). See also: B. Kendall, "Insight: The New Order?" British Broadcasting Company (Online), 9 February 2009. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in\\_depth/7879202.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/7879202.stm) (accessed 9 February 2009). See also: L. Saralayeva, "Kyrgyz Vote on U.S. Base Held Up by Russian Aid," Associated Press International, 9 February 2009. [http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5goSq-Hk4\\_xi9Fm7sI4SLjpc5neiwD9687NC07](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5goSq-Hk4_xi9Fm7sI4SLjpc5neiwD9687NC07) (accessed 9 February 2009).

286 J. Loven, "Bush Begins Trip; Tensions Remain," Rutland Herald Online, 7 May 2005. <http://www.rutlandherald.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050507/NEWS/505070392/1024> (accessed 10 February 2009).

State Department spokesman made light of the effort by stating: “I suppose if it is in fact true then they found a few ships that can make it that far.”<sup>287</sup> This statement meshes with the more serious assessment given by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in which he described the Russian military as a shell of its former self.<sup>288</sup>

Once those ships did manage to make Venezuelan ports, the military exercises between Venezuela and Russia in which they participated did not spark a concerned reaction from the United States. In fact, when questioned about these exercises, ADM James Stavridis, Commander of U.S. Southern Command, downplayed the exercises and described them as holding no real consequence for the parties involved or for the United States. To stress this point, he indicated that the United States is entirely unaffected from a security standpoint and that it will continue its operations in the region.<sup>289</sup> The deputy director of intelligence at U.S. Southern Command remarked that the level of military cooperation was not in any way meaningful and that he did not believe they were really serious about putting together a military coalition.<sup>290</sup> These sentiments echoed earlier statements from Assistant Secretary of State, Thomas Shannon, when he stated that the military maneuvers do not represent a “military or geopolitical threat.”<sup>291</sup>

While the U.S. government may not feel a military or geopolitical threat emanating from Russian–Venezuelan solidarity, it did feel compelled to represent its interests concerning Russian activity within Latin America. A few months after making the above statement, Thomas Shannon travelled to Russia to engage the Medvedev administration regarding the Russian relationship with Latin America. As Shannon remarked while in Moscow, the United States and Russia are “too important” to avoid

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287 W. Blitzer, "Transcripts from 'the Situation Room,'" CNN.com, 8 September 2008. <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0809/08/sitroom.02.html> (accessed 10 February 2009).

288 L. Dobbs, "Transcripts from 'Lou Dobbs this Week,'" CNN.com, 28 September 2008. <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0809/28/ldtw.01.html> (accessed 10 February 2009).

289 "U.S. Unconcerned over Russian Naval Maneuvers," International Herald Tribune (online), 16 December 2008. <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/16 December america/NA-US-Russian-Warships.php?page=1> (accessed 5 February 2009).

290 Ibid.

291 Kellerhalls, Russian Overtures to Venezuela Not a Threat, U.S. Official Says.

“working together on important issues in the [Latin American] region.”<sup>292</sup> Shannon’s trip indicates a slight shift in U.S. government opinion concerning the bond shared by Russia and Venezuela. U.S. officials had previously stated in October 2008 that the close relations between Russia and Venezuela were not an emerging security threat and that both countries were “pursuing different interests and different agendas, which makes their relationship unstable and not likely to be enduring.”<sup>293</sup> The natural question that results is, if this assessment is correct and the relationship between Russia and Venezuela (by far Russia’s closest and busiest ally in the region) is not likely to endure, what prompted the need for a visit by Thomas Shannon to discuss Russian engagement in the region?

One answer to this question is that the U.S. government actually is somewhat concerned with the ongoing interaction between Russia and Venezuela. However, political niceties and a sensible desire to avoid worsening already poor relations between the United States and both Russia and Venezuela prevent the U.S. government from expressing concern over how the Russian–Venezuelan relationship may have the capacity to affect U.S. interests at home and abroad.

## B. INDICATIONS OF A LARGER, STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The first indication of the Russian–Venezuelan acquaintance transforming into a long-term strategic relationship was the increasing complexity and multifaceted nature of each subsequent agreement. While Chávez has always maintained that Venezuela’s dealings with Russia are strategic, the initial agreements do not necessarily bear out this assertion. For example, the terms of the initial agreements signed, such as the one for Russian assault rifles, were markedly simpler than the agreements that are currently being discussed.<sup>294</sup> Whereas the early agreements were described in terms of cash for arms, the

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292 "U.S. Diplomat in Moscow to Discuss Latin America," International Herald Tribune (online), 22 December 2008. <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/12/22/europe/EU-Russia-US-Latin-America.php> (accessed 10 February 2009).

293 Kellerhalls, Russian Overtures to Venezuela Not a Threat, U.S. Official Says.

294 M. Towson, "100,000 AK-103 Russian Assault Rifles for Venezuela," U.S. House of Representatives, 25 July 2005. [http://www.house.gov/list/press/i110\\_kirk/venezuelarifles.html](http://www.house.gov/list/press/i110_kirk/venezuelarifles.html) (accessed 25 January 2009).

more recent agreements offer and demand more than a ‘cash on the barrelhead’ proposition. At least one of the agreements included a provision for one billion dollars in Russian loans to enable Venezuela to purchase Russian hardware.<sup>295</sup> The recent arms agreements negotiated and agreed upon by Russia and Venezuela are accompanied in the same setting by economic, industrial, banking, and energy agreements.<sup>296</sup> While early agreements also included a wide variety of items, more recent agreements move beyond a simple “buy and sell” relationship across many different fields and incorporate use of joint consortiums to fund loans to one side or the other or to further joint development projects (as described in the next two paragraphs). Although this isn’t necessarily unusual between friendly nations, the rapid development of such arrangements over a period of just a few years is quite striking and without precedent for either of the parties involved.

There are additional factors by which the relationship can be described as strategic to both parties. One of the more recent advances in the relationship is the advent of efforts aimed at establishing consortiums by which cooperation in multiple spheres can be more easily and readily carried out. The first instance of this is the founding of a joint Russian–Venezuelan bank. Both Russia and Venezuela agreed to this step in September 2008, although the original idea was introduced by then–President Vladimir Putin in 2006.<sup>297</sup> On the heels of this September agreement, Venezuela’s finance minister, Ali Rodriguez, traveled to Russia to discuss formation of a bi–national investment bank.<sup>298</sup>

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295 M. Schwirtz, "Russia Loans Venezuela \$1 Billion for Military," New York Times (Online), 26 September 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/27/world/americas/27chavez.html?fta=y> (accessed 26 January 2009).

296 L. Pronina and M. Walter, "Medvedev and Chavez Sign Oil, Nuclear Deals," The Moscow Times (Online), 28 November 2008. <http://www.moscowtimes.ru/article/600/42/372716.htm> (accessed 26 January 2009).

297 M. Zygar and others, "Hugo Chávez' Rating Soared a Billion," Kommersant Moscow (Online), 27 September 2008. [http://www.kommersant.com/p1032593/Russia\\_and\\_Venezuela\\_negotiating\\_big\\_deals/](http://www.kommersant.com/p1032593/Russia_and_Venezuela_negotiating_big_deals/) (accessed 25 January 2009).

298 Marquez, Venezuela–Russia: Business Deals Consolidate Alliance. See also: "Venezuela, Russia Discuss 46 Cooperation Projects," People's Daily (Online)—Xinhua, 07 November 2008. <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90777/90852/6529432.html> (accessed 25 January 2009).

In October 2008, a consortium was formed between five Russian oil companies operating in Venezuela—Rosneft, Lukoil, Gazprom, TNK–BP, and Surgutneftegaz.<sup>299</sup> This move by these Russian companies anticipates creation of a larger energy conglomerate consisting of the five Russian companies and spearheaded by Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA), Venezuela’s state run oil company. Russian Energy Minister Sergei Shmatko has stated that investments will exceed “tens of billions of dollars.”<sup>300</sup> The idea behind the formation of this consortium is that both countries would be able to “share resources necessary for production and sale of oil and gas.”<sup>301</sup> The complexion of the relationship is certainly different than it was just a few short years ago. The negotiations between the two countries and the agreements they produce touch upon virtually every potential area for trade. The context of the original agreements has continually been expanded to incorporate increasing levels of, and longer time horizons for, mutual cooperation. Airline service between the two countries, Venezuelan automotive production, and construction of industrial mills are now routine subject matter in the course of negotiations.<sup>302</sup>

The increasing importance of Russia as an arms supplier to Venezuela since 2006 also makes it an essential strategic partner. As recently as 2005, the majority of military hardware purchased by Venezuela did not originate from Russia, but rather from Spain, Brazil, and other countries.<sup>303</sup> Today, however, Russian arms are by far the dominant force in Venezuelan weapons imports. This increased Venezuelan dependency on Russia to satisfy military–technical needs and desires infers Russia will be a central component of Venezuela’s modernization and development of military capability far into the future.

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299 Marquez, Venezuela–Russia: Business Deals Consolidate Alliance.

300 "Venezuela, Russia Expected to Sign Energy Deal," Tehran Times, 25 November 2008. [http://www.tehrantimes.com/index\\_View.asp?code=183283](http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=183283) (accessed 25 January 2009).

301 E. Barry, "Russia Flexes Muscles in Oil Deal with Chávez," New York Times (Online), 26 September 2008. [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/27/world/americas/27russia.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/27/world/americas/27russia.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1) (accessed 21 November 2008).

302 M. Walter and L. Pronina, "Medevedev, Chavez Sign Oil Agreements before War Games," Bloomberg (Online), 27 November 2008. <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601207&sid=apvq89J6utOc> (accessed 26 January 2009).

303 M. Bromley and C. Perdomo, "CBM's in Latin America and the Effect of Arms Acquisitions by Venezuela," El Cano Royal Institute Working Papers 41, (2005).

The Russian decision to send strategic bombers to Venezuela in September 2008 is another example of the increasingly strategic nature of the relationship.<sup>304</sup> The bombers are seen as “strategic game-changers” and their deployment is used by Russia to send a response to the United States regarding U.S. policy in other areas of the world, most notably Poland and Georgia.<sup>305</sup> While Russia only resumed flying strategic aircraft outside of its territory in 2007,<sup>306</sup> the timing of the deployments to Venezuela is considered by some to be a definitive demonstration of strategic action designed to send a signal to the United States and others.<sup>307</sup> In the same manner, the deployment of Russian ships to Venezuela for exercises in the Caribbean Sea is another example of the growing strategic dimension of the relationship. The week prior to the arrival of the Russian strategic bombers in Venezuela, both countries announced plans for a visit from Russian military ships to Venezuelan ports, with the possibility of holding joint naval exercises.<sup>308</sup> These exercises did, in fact, take place in November 2008, with the Russian participation consisting of a cruiser, an anti-submarine destroyer, and two support ships, along with 1600 marines.<sup>309</sup>

The scope of the agreements and the level of commitment from both Russia and Venezuela clearly illustrate their belief in the strategic importance of the relationship. Both countries have invested massive amounts of time, money, and effort into the relationship and a positive return is expected by both sides. Venezuela is almost

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304 Schwirtz, Russia Loans Venezuela \$1 Billion for Military.

305 R. Simha, "Might of the White Swan—Game Changer," India Empire (Online), 10 September 2008. <http://www.indiaempire.com/v1/2008/November/international.asp> (accessed 26 January 2009).

306 "Russian Strategic Bombers Return Home from Venezuela," RIA Novosti (Online), 19 September 2008. <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080919/116949143.html> (accessed 26 January 2009).

307 R. Walser, "Chávez, Venezuela, and Russia: A New Cuban Missile Crisis?" Heritage Foundation (Online), 15 September 2008. [http://209.85.173.132/search?q=cache:8ZdvEmc6coAJ:www.heritage.org/research/latinamerica/upload/wm\\_2064.pdf+ChÁvez,+Venezuela,+and+Russia:+A+New+Cuban+Missile+Crisis?&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us](http://209.85.173.132/search?q=cache:8ZdvEmc6coAJ:www.heritage.org/research/latinamerica/upload/wm_2064.pdf+ChÁvez,+Venezuela,+and+Russia:+A+New+Cuban+Missile+Crisis?&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us) (accessed 26 January 2009).

308 M. Tkachenko, M. Chance and C. Keyes, "Russian Ships to Visit Venezuela; Naval Exercises Possible," CNN (Online), 09 September 2008. <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/09/08/russia.venezuela/index.html> (accessed 26 January 2009).

309 A. Cohen, "Russia Provokes U.S. with Venezuela Sea Exercises," United Press International, 09 January 2009. [http://www.upi.com/Security\\_Industry/2009/01/07/Russia\\_provokes\\_US\\_with\\_Venezuela\\_sea\\_exercises/UPI-31861231367401/](http://www.upi.com/Security_Industry/2009/01/07/Russia_provokes_US_with_Venezuela_sea_exercises/UPI-31861231367401/) (accessed 26 January 2009).

exclusively reliant upon Russia for weapons purchases and necessary technical expertise, and no other country has the capability (or has expressed the inclination) to work as closely with Venezuela as has Russia. While the relationship may appear to be less strategic for Russia because it benefits Russian material interests, it also builds future Russian wealth, providing outlets for demonstration of a rebuilt international prowess. These benefits clearly match articulated foreign policy goals of Russia's governmental leaders and the relationship seems to have been pursued, in part at least, in order to fulfill these strategic goals.

Whatever the initial motivation for Russian military involvement with Venezuela—either short-term material interests or a concerted strategic effort—its evolution and current state provide evidence of a strategic framework guiding the relationship. The contemporary foreign policies of Venezuela and Russia are so inextricably linked to the relationship that its demise would be extremely damaging to both parties' efforts on the international scene. Currently, neither Russia nor Venezuela would be able to replace the benefits each enjoys from the relationship, particularly the political benefits. The benefits of Russian–Venezuelan cooperation have been so heavily trumpeted, both sides need the relationship to succeed in order to avoid failure. While Russian foreign policy may be able to endure failure of its relationship with Venezuela, such a failure would seriously impact long-term strategic goals of Russia. The relationship is relied upon by Russia to advance its international clout and long-term wealth. Currently, there are no other alternatives that would be able to replace the long-term economic and political benefits of the relationship with Russia. Although the requirement for success is more immediate where Venezuela is concerned, this does not infer that the relationship is less important or less valuable for Russia.

The increasing level of commitment by both sides influences the willingness to work harder and apply more purposeful effort toward realization of both sides' goals, which have been incorporated into the framework of the relationship. Chávez's characterization of the Venezuelan relationship with Russia as strategic in nature<sup>310</sup>,

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<sup>310</sup> Putin, Venezuela's Chavez Plan Anti-U.S. Alliance, newsmax.com.

while it has taken several years to be believed, is now becoming accepted as fact by the Latin American region and international community, at large. Jaime Darembel, a former Costa Rican ambassador to the United States who now works for the Hudson Institute in Washington, DC, alludes to this and other “strategic partnerships” in a recent paper written to provide advice to the U.S. President-elect (now President Obama) concerning Latin American issues, calling it a “perfect storm” of challenges.<sup>311</sup>

### C. POSSIBLE TENSIONS IN THE STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP

While politics and rhetoric are sometimes inaccurate in detailing motivation for actions of particular states, they can be useful in providing a generalized opinion of one state in reference to another. One of the main reasons offered by Chávez for such a close relationship with Russia is his desire for a multipolar world. This theme is one that he has repeatedly utilized when speaking of Venezuela’s agreements with Russia. In September of last year, following the aforementioned visit of Russian strategic bombers to Venezuela, Chávez explained that Latin America needed Russia for economic development, social development, and all around support. He added that not only Venezuela, but Latin America as a whole needed “friends like Russia now as we are shedding [U.S.] domination.”<sup>312</sup> These comments remain in line with the declaration signed very early on in the relationship (in May 2001) between the two countries that condemned U.S. “domination.”<sup>313</sup> The Venezuelan President has always been a critic of strong U.S. influence on the international scene, and his efforts are pointedly aimed at countering U.S. influence and policy in the Latin American region.

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311 J. Morrison, "Embassy Row- Latin Storm," The Washington Times (Online), 16 January 2009. <http://washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jan/16/embassy-row-95446917/> (accessed 26 January 2009).

312 "Chavez Says Latin America Needs Russia," International Herald Tribune (Online), 21 September 2008. <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/09/21/europe/EU-Russia-Venezuela.php> (accessed 26 January 2009).

313 “Analysis: Russia-U.S. Fence Mending,” United Press International, 15 May 2001. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P1-44293626.html> (accessed 26 January 2009).

Russia's stance on U.S. influence in the world is considerably less vocal, although it is similar in nature to Venezuela's. As mentioned in the above paragraph, they, too, signed the May 2001 declaration "condemning alleged U.S. domination."<sup>314</sup> The notable difference in the Russian approach, however, is that Russia is less direct in its criticism. While Chávez clearly refers to the United States as a negative force in Latin America and the rest of the world, Russia prefers a less pointed approach. While it is impossible to know for sure, the controversial declarations of Chávez and his aggressive persona possibly created a delay in Russian–Venezuelan meetings at the highest level, as Putin, who promised to visit Venezuela as early as 2002, has yet to do so.<sup>315</sup> More recently, as the Moscow Times noted, "only a limited number of reporters were admitted to cover the meetings" between Medvedev and Chávez in July 2008, "fueling speculation that Chávez's anti–U.S. rhetoric was uncomfortable [for] the Kremlin."<sup>316</sup> Coverage of the meetings from *Kommersant*, another Russian newspaper, describes Medvedev as "taken aback" by Chávez's inclusion of his name in a list of "Latin America's foremost leftist revolutionaries."<sup>317</sup> In spite of these concerns, Russia has been able to employ a suitably consistent euphemism that satisfies the demand for an adequate level of solidarity with Venezuela, yet avoids categorically pinning the blame for international catastrophes on the United States. Russia, instead of countering the United States, will assist with "establishing a multipolar world." During the recent visit to Venezuela, Medvedev was careful to point out that Russian involvement is "not a market relationship or aimed at any other state, but is based on partnership."<sup>318</sup>

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314 Analysis: Russia-U.S. Fence Mending, United Press International.

315 Katz, The Putin-Chávez Partnership.

316 R. Amsterdam, "The Russia-Venezuela Partnership: Strategic for Who?" [robertamsterdam.com](http://www.robertamsterdam.com/2008/07/the_russiavenezuela_partnershi.htm) (online), 23 July 2008. [http://www.robertamsterdam.com/2008/07/the\\_russiavenezuela\\_partnershi.htm](http://www.robertamsterdam.com/2008/07/the_russiavenezuela_partnershi.htm) (accessed 21 March 2009).

317 Amsterdam, The Russia-Venezuela Partnership: Strategic for Who?

318 I. Kramnik, "Russia, Venezuela Leaders Vow Closer Ties Ahead of Navy Exercise," RIA Novosti (Online), 26 November 2008. [http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Russia\\_Venezuela\\_leaders\\_vow\\_closer\\_ties\\_ahead\\_of\\_navy\\_exercise\\_99.html](http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Russia_Venezuela_leaders_vow_closer_ties_ahead_of_navy_exercise_99.html) (accessed 26 January 2009).

Examination of the relationship between Russia and Venezuela reveals a myriad of interests in common. Both President Medvedev and President Chávez are striving to continually develop the relationship to maximize its potential support for the policy goals of their respective administrations. The energy linkages created by the agreements are considerable, so much so that it is difficult to foresee either country changing course. This is especially true considering the degree to which each country relies upon energy as the engine that drives its economy. These links are reinforced by the economic and security benefits provided by the sale of Russian arms to Venezuela. As we will see in the following two chapters, each country's political stance with regard to the United States also encourages utilization of the relationship as a vehicle for promoting its strategic and political goals on the international scene. At present, the relationship is stronger than ever before and it is difficult to foresee any change that would cause either side to reduce its role in the relationship.

#### **D. THE LOGIC OF THE RUSSIAN–VENEZUELAN RELATIONSHIP**

Thus far, the discussion has dealt with Russian and Venezuelan perceptions individually. However, it is also necessary to use these same perceptions to examine the relationship that has formed between the two parties. By examining the perceptions of each, it is possible to identify the likely objectives of both sides and how they intend to use the relationship as a vehicle for achieving foreign policy goals. Ultimately, this examination should also reveal the fault lines upon which the relationship may begin to crumble. While common perceptions may serve to bolster relations between Russia and Venezuela, misperceptions and divergent views can just as easily break it apart.

##### **1. Benefits of the Relationship**

As previous chapters showed, the relationship between Russia and Venezuela mainly touches on three different spheres—the economic sphere, the international political sphere, and the strategic–military sphere. It is potential gains in these three areas that attract these two states to each other and compel them to continue their seemingly unnatural cooperation.

The aspect of the relationship that offers the maximum mutual benefit to both sides is the economic aspect. By partnering with Russia, Venezuela is able to leverage technical expertise, which it does not possess in adequate supply, and realize development of its oil and gas fields.<sup>319</sup> Additionally, Venezuela is able to share exploration and development costs associated with locating and producing oil (particularly in the Orinoco region), natural gas, and minerals.<sup>320</sup> The degree to which Venezuela relies on these resources for maintaining economic stability cannot be overstated. Venezuela is a resource economy, and has been since the discovery of oil underneath the surface of its territory.<sup>321</sup> The assistance provided by Russia through the relationship opens the possibility for assistance in repairing depleted infrastructure caused by lack of long overdue reinvestment.<sup>322</sup>

While Venezuela may see improvement in its leading economic sector due to Russian help, this benefit is shared with Russia. As Russia takes advantage of the economic opportunities made available by the agreements with Venezuela, it is able to diversify business operations across two continents.<sup>323</sup> Not only is Russia able to diversify operations of its main economic engine (the energy sector), it is able to do so while gaining exclusive access to what are potentially very lucrative sources of energy production.<sup>324</sup> Recently concluded agreements have even provided Russia access to

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319 Hults, Petroleos De Venezuela, SA: The Right-Hand Man of the Government See also: L. Clough, "Energy Profile of Venezuela," Encyclopedia of Earth, 1 July 2008. [https://www.eoearth.org/article/Energy\\_profile\\_of\\_Venezuela](https://www.eoearth.org/article/Energy_profile_of_Venezuela) (accessed 19 March 2009).

320 Hults, Petroleos De Venezuela, SA: The Right-Hand Man of the Government.

321 Tompson, A Frozen Venezuela? The 'Resource Curse' and Russian Politics.

322 E. Gue, "Crude Oil Production Means Investment—Iran and Venezuela are Failing to Invest," The Market Oracle (online), 8 February 2007. <http://www.marketoracle.co.uk/Article324.html> (accessed 19 March 2009). See also: B. Ellsworth, "Venezuela Copes with Crumbling Infrastructure," NPR (online), 19 January 2006. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5162934> (accessed 19 March 2009).

323 F. Petersen and F. Freland, "Chávez and Medvedev Vow Continued Cooperation," france24.com (online), 27 November 2008. <http://www.france24.com/en/20081127-chavez-greets-medvedev-with-deals-controversy-russia-venezuela> (accessed 20 March 2009).

324 "Chávez Courts Russian Investment in Venezuela," International Herald Tribune (online), 29 June 2007. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/06/29/business/chavez.php> (accessed 20 March 2009). See also: Wallander, Russian Transimperialism and its Implications.

potential sources that exist elsewhere in Latin America, most notably in Bolivia.<sup>325</sup> Business conducted between Venezuela and Russia is not limited to energy, although the energy sector is by far the largest contributor. Agreements to date have also covered the airline, defense, and heavy industries.<sup>326</sup>

The pure economic gain for each participant is adequate to motivate continued cooperation, and has been well documented. However, one other possibility that is often overlooked is the pressure the new business consortium and inter-governmental commission may impart on international markets, most notably on the oil market.<sup>327</sup> Russia and Venezuela do have a history of working together to control oil output in order to stabilize prices and protect the economies of oil producing nations both inside and outside of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).<sup>328</sup> Previously, these efforts have been fraught with indecision and reversals of verbal agreements, as Russia's position outside of OPEC creates different incentives than exist for the countries inside OPEC.<sup>329</sup> Thanks to the Russian and Venezuelan state companies' union of effort and interests, however, any such cooperation would be far more likely in the future. As Russian and Venezuelan energy interests in Venezuela become identical, what is good for

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325 "Bolivian President to Arrive in Russia on Official Visit," RIA Novosti (Russia Information Agency), 15 February 2009. <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090215/120148726.html> (accessed 20 March 2009). See also: Alvarez, Venezuela's Oil-Based Economy and: Wallander, Russian Transimperialism and its Implications.

326 "Foreign Minister Maduro: Accords Signed between Russia and Venezuela Strengthen a Multipolar World," Consulate General of Venezuela, Chicago, United States, 6 November 2008. [http://embavenez-us.org/\\_chicago/index.php?pagina=news.php&nid=4639](http://embavenez-us.org/_chicago/index.php?pagina=news.php&nid=4639) (accessed 20 March 2009). See also: M. Walter and S. Bodzin, "Venezuela Courts Russian Investment as Oil Tumbles," Bloomberg.com (online), 6 November 2008. <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=conewsstory&refer=conews&tkr=LKOH:RU&sid=ahgcaFElB4> (accessed 20 March 2009).

327 "Russia, Venezuela to Set Up Joint Venture in Oil Industry," ITAR-TASS, 13 March 2009. <http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=13678001&PageNum=0> (accessed 20 March 2009). See also: A. Foek, "Venezuela Worries Aruba," The Washington Times, 13 January 2009. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jan/13/venezuela-worries-aruba/> (accessed 20 March 2009).

328 Katz, The Putin-Chávez Partnership.

329 Ibid.

PDVSA is good for GAZPROM.<sup>330</sup> In sum, the potential energy clout through collective price stability measures and agreements with OPEC countries and others is significant.

In addition to the significant financial advantages of cooperation, the political advantages obtained are genuine considerations of both parties. The relationship offers each an opportunity to highlight to the rest of the world their relevance as a major player on the international scene. This is absolutely crucial for Venezuela, as the policy of Chávez places an ideology, the Bolívarian Revolution, above other priorities.<sup>331</sup> As it has been defined, this revolution is a generic set of beliefs (opposition to free market economics, U.S. hegemony, and globalization) aimed at attracting like-minded supporters in Latin America.<sup>332</sup> With Venezuela already in the grasp of this movement, it is critical this revolution be packaged for an audience external to Venezuela. In order to attract followers, it is imperative that the messenger be judged strong and effective (legitimate), as well as persuasive.

The initiative to join forces and successfully cooperate with Russia—a nation far removed from his own—is perceived by Chávez and his supporters as conclusive proof of his administration’s international prowess.<sup>333</sup> Their hope is other governments in the region will view the progress between Russia and Venezuela and recognize it as a product of the Bolívarian Revolution and exclusive to the Chávez approach. This would result in a tremendous political boost to Venezuela and to Chávez in terms of status, respect, and latitude for future action.<sup>334</sup> Currently, Venezuela’s government is putting forth a massive effort to establish itself on the international scene. This effort is corroborated by the list of international initiatives Chávez has sponsored, including

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330 With Gazprom as the operator and PDVSA as the controlling stake in the integrated business consortium described in: "Gazprom to Become Russia-Venezuela Energy Consortium Operator," RIA Novosti, 22 October 2008. <http://en.rian.ru/business/20081022/117892646.html> (accessed 20 March 2009).

331 C.E. Wilson, The Bolivarian Revolution According to Hugo Chávez.

332 Ibid. See also: Gott, Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution. See also: Shifter, In Search of Hugo Chávez.

333 Foreign Minister Maduro: Accords Signed between Russia and Venezuela Strengthen a Multipolar World.

334 Hakim, Is Washington Losing Latin America? See also: Castaneda, Latin America's Left Turn.

Venezuela's attempt to gain a seat on the UN Security Council.<sup>335</sup> Chávez understands the international arena will play host to the decisive struggle for advancing the revolution. For the revolution to succeed outside Venezuela, it is necessary that relationships (like the one with Russia) demonstrate the Bolívarian system's international viability and legitimacy. If the relationship fails, governments will question the ability of the Bolívarian revolution to produce legitimate results and act as a substitute for the international support usually provided by the United States in the hemisphere.

Though the relationship is urgent for Chávez, it also offers Russia a tremendous reward, especially where that state's long term international political goals are concerned. The relationship affords Russia the chance to express itself to the international community on broader issues. Russian (and Venezuelan, for that matter) calls for a multipolar world offer an inkling of resentment about U.S. strength and willingness to be active internationally.<sup>336</sup> Russian use of the relationship as a tactic to express its political disagreement with the United States and others on international issues, by selling arms over U.S. protests, for example, is a valid way for Russia to establish opposition to perceived U.S. hegemony.<sup>337</sup> By establishing bona fides and a certain level of anti-U.S. credibility, Russia stands to be better positioned politically to court the interests of order-breaker states that remain, willingly or otherwise, outside the influence of Washington.<sup>338</sup> Multipolarity has been somewhat of a buzz word between Moscow and Caracas and is consistently used by both to describe their mutual efforts, as well as their efforts with other states.<sup>339</sup> The relationship with Venezuela, then, offers Russia political capital for use in its relations with other governments. Even if the relationship with Venezuela is

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335 M. J. Powell, The U.S. and Chávez: To Confront or to Contain. See also: Lapper, Living with Hugo: U.S. Policy Toward Hugo Chávez's Venezuela.

336 Simes, Losing Russia See also: Gabriel Marcella, "American Grand Strategy for Latin America in the Age of Resentment," Strategic Studies Institute 1, no. 1 (October, 2007), 2-71.  
<http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=811> (accessed 3 February 2009).

337 "Russian Arms Sale to Chávez Irks U.S." The Washington Times, 10 February 2005.  
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/feb/10/20050210-123420-3113r/> (accessed 20 March 2009).

338 Brief description of order breaker states as relates to Venezuela found in: H. A. Trinkunas, "The Logic of Venezuelan Foreign Policy during the Chávez Era" paper prepared for the 50th Conference of the International Studies Association (New York, 14-17 February 2009), 2008.

339 Foreign Minister Maduro: Accords Signed between Russia and Venezuela Strengthen a Multipolar World.

not completely successful from the Russian standpoint (although it would certainly help), it can still be used to create this effect. As long as Russia puts forth the appearance of a good faith effort in its relationship with Venezuela, this political advantage can be obtained.

In addition to these short-term benefits, Russia views its relationship with Venezuela as evidence that it has begun its rise from the ashes of the post Cold War period to resume its role as a great world power. This, in fact, is a specific goal of Russian foreign policy, as outlined several times by Russian statements and actions.<sup>340</sup> The use of the relationship to express discontent over a particular instance of U.S. action or policy is a simple tactic that is easily understood and seized upon by many observers.<sup>341</sup> However, using the relationship to advance the foreign policy goals of Russia over time transforms the tactic mentioned above into a cohesive strategy for achieving foreign policy goals and for conducting international relations. From Russia's point of view, consistent employment of this tactic will assist in restoring Russia's place as a dominant member of the international order. Should Russia's exhibitions of solidarity for multipolarity and its ardent defense of state sovereignty triumphantly return Russia to such a globally influential position, the end result produces the following effect: a quasi-bipolar international system with the United States as one pole and Russia (and friends) as the other. Given the recent Russian moves to influence affairs in Central Asia, this seems an outcome Russia would not mind achieving.<sup>342</sup>

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340 G. Feifer, "Russia: Putin Says Russia should Become 'Great Power,'" Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 16 May 2003. <http://www.rferl.org/content/Article/1103255.html> (accessed 21 March 2009). See also: E. Barry, "Russia, and Putin, Assert Authority," New York Times (online), 11 August 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/12/world/europe/12putin.html?fta=y&pagewanted=all> (accessed 21 March 2009).

341 F. Daniel, "Russia President, Warships to Venezuela to Counter U.S." Reuters, 23 November 2008. <http://www.reuters.com/article/vcCandidateFeed2/idUSTRE4AM1Z720081123> (accessed 21 March 2009). See also: J. McIntyre and L. Ure, "Expert: Russia-Venezuela Military Exercises Reaction to U.S. Moves," CNN.com (online), 25 September 2008. <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/americas/09/25/russia.venezuela/index.html> (accessed 21 March 2009).

342 Z. Feng, "The Russia-Georgia Military Conflict: For China, Does it Mean Scrambling Between a "Strategic Partnership" and Being a "Responsible Stakeholder"?" Korean Journal of Defense Analysis 20, no. 4 (2008), 305-318. See also: "U.S. Must Agree with Russia on Afghanistan Supplies," RIA Novosti (Russian Information Agency), 6 February 2009. <http://en.rian.ru/world/20090206/120013388.html> (accessed 21 March 2009).

Venezuela's most obvious strategic-military benefits from the relationship arrive in the form of increased military capability leading to increased power both in absolute terms and relative to its neighbors.<sup>343</sup> Although Chávez has claimed these acquisitions are necessary to defend against U.S. imperialism or any other threat (perhaps Colombia), it is unlikely that an attack is forthcoming.<sup>344</sup> Still, these purchases are important to construct the image of a state that possesses adequate power to secure its interests and safeguard its authority and control. This is doubly crucial for a state seeking to do so outside the confines of its own borders. In the absence of real power (defined here as military capability), threats, assertions, and claims ring hollow and are viewed by others as less than legitimate. The arms purchases carried out by the Chávez administration are strategically designed to promote and broadcast realist international legitimacy—the perception that Venezuela can muster the necessary force to maintain security and stability in defense of the Bolívarian revolution not only within Venezuela, but also throughout the greater Latin American region.<sup>345</sup>

Discussions on Venezuela's acquisition of military hardware fail to grasp this point. They are primarily centered on whether or not Venezuelan acquisitions of weapons, made possible by the Russian-Venezuelan relationship, should concern governments in the region, particularly the neighbors of Venezuela<sup>346</sup>. Generally speaking, weapons systems and military hardware are easily counted and their uses easily understood. After all, it is reasonable to assume purchases of billions of dollars worth of military hardware imply they will, at some point, be used. This yields a tendency for analysis of security situations to concentrate on capability with little regard for the

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343 Caribbean and Latin America, *The Military Balance*, 2008. See also: Bromley and Perdomo, CBM's in Latin America and the Effect of Arms Acquisitions by Venezuela.

344 "Chávez Asks World to Halt Alleged Planned U.S. Attack on Iran," *antara.co.id* (online), 26 March 2007. <http://www.antara.co.id/en/arc/2007/3/26/chavez-asks-world-to-halt-alleged-planned-us-attack-on-iran/> (accessed 21 March 2009).

345 Marcella, American Grand Strategy for Latin America in the Age of Resentment. See also: Schoen and Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home: Hugo Chávez and the War Against America*.

346 J. M. Roberts, "If the Real Simón Bolívar Met Hugo Chávez, He'd See Red," *Backgrounder* (Heritage Foundation Report) 13, no. 2062, 29 August 2007.

inclination to employ it.<sup>347</sup> Governments reinforce this practice by traditionally estimating potential threats first on the basis of military hardware or fluctuations in a rival's power and then by demonstrations of intent.<sup>348</sup> The Russian–Venezuelan relationship's effect on Latin American security may not be entirely clear, but Venezuela certainly possesses more military might (in absolute and relative terms) than it did previously. This fact alone has caused some in the region to look unfavorably upon the relationship, further polarizing an already politically divided Latin America.<sup>349</sup> Pragmatic analysis of Venezuelan intent to utilize this increased military might for something other than military exercises (along with the lack of an appropriate opportunity), however, leads to the conclusion that the arms purchases, while perhaps strategic for the “national” interest, are less a threat to security and more a struggle for legitimacy.

Whether the United States or others believe Venezuela is a viable regional force, or that Russia will once again become a superpower, is immaterial. What does matter is how each state views itself and also how it is viewed by others, especially by prospective allies or business partners. Is Russia a dominant force, or is it becoming one? Do prospective allies consider the Venezuelan model a realistically feasible alternative for their country? It is important to remember that in reality these questions are not answered by scholarly studies or by third party observers such as the United States. Instead, the answers are provided by governments in search of a suitable improvement model for their country and enlightened by entirely different, unique perceptions of themselves and the international system.

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347 Reflected in the tone of testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee as found in: LT GEN Maples, M.D. (Director, Defense Intelligence Agency), "Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States," Statement for the Record, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence 11, (27 February 2007).

348 Although Venezuela was deemed non-threatening to the United States, analysis in this study specifically measured the “potential security threat” based solely on “military capability”: Q. Fulgham, “Venezuela’s Potential Threat to the United States’ National Security: An Analysis of the Conflictual Inter-Country Relationship,” Army War College Carlisle Barracks, PA, 15 March 2006.

349 "U.S., Latin America: The President Tours a Divided Region," Stratfor: Global Intelligence, 7 March 2007. [http://www.stratfor.com/u\\_s\\_latin\\_america\\_president\\_tours\\_divided\\_region](http://www.stratfor.com/u_s_latin_america_president_tours_divided_region) (accessed 19 February 2009).

## **2. The Future of the Relationship**

In spite of the apparent multitude of benefits enjoyed by both Russia and Venezuela as a result of their relationship, there are scenarios that could potentially lead to its dissolution. Most of these envision significant drops in energy prices, thereby pressuring the agendas of both Russia and Venezuela, individually as well as collectively.<sup>350</sup> As each country's economy is essentially resource-based<sup>351</sup>, energy markets are critical to maintaining GDP growth. Energy's ability to fund government policy in both of these countries has served to fuel the debate over whether or not the policies of both Russia and Venezuela are insulated well enough from variance in prices to remain sustainable.<sup>352</sup> The generally held belief is that the policies of Chávez are unsustainable in their current form and will require modification and reinvestment in the country's energy infrastructure.<sup>353</sup> Russian policy and practice is generally considered to be under the same type of infrastructure pressure, although policy sustainability is presumed to rely more heavily on Russia's ability to participate in international markets.<sup>354</sup> The commonly arrived at economic conclusion is that Russian and Venezuelan international policy and expansive government spending will eventually be constrained due to administrative mismanagement<sup>355</sup> and weakness in energy prices.<sup>356</sup>

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350 Katz, The Putin-Chávez Partnership See also: Shifter, In Search of Hugo Chávez.

351 Tompson, A Frozen Venezuela? The Resource Curse and Russian Politics.

352 C. Alvarez, "Venezuela's Oil-Based Economy," Council on Foreign Relations Press, 9 February 2009. [http://www.cfr.org/publication/12089/venezuelas\\_oilbased\\_economy.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/12089/venezuelas_oilbased_economy.html) (accessed 11 February 2009). See also: W. Tompson, "The Political Implications of Russia's Resource-Based Economy," Post-Soviet Affairs 21, no. 4 (2005), 335-359.

353 Reid, Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America's Soul.

354 V. Milov, L. L. Coburn and I. Danchenko, "Russia's Energy Policy, 1992-2005," Eurasian Geography and Economics 47, no. 3 (2006), 285-313. See also: C. A. Wallander, "Russian Transimperialism and its Implications," The Washington Quarterly 30, no. 2 (2007), 107-122.

355 I. Bremmer, "The Return of State Capitalism," Survival 50, no. 3 (2008), 55-64. See also: I. Bremmer, "Oil: A Bumpy Ride Ahead," World Policy Journal 25, no. 3 (2008), 89-94.

356 "The Spluttering Axis of Diesel—an Axis in Need of Oiling," The Economist, 23 October 2008. [http://www.economist.com/world/international/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=12480942](http://www.economist.com/world/international/displaystory.cfm?story_id=12480942) (accessed 12 February 2009). See also: "Falling Oil Prices Sap Power of Anti-U.S. Regimes," The Heat Zone (Online), 29 October 2008. <http://heatusa.com/blog/uncategorized/falling-oil-prices-sap-power-anti-us-regimes/> (accessed 12 February 2009).

If this turns out to be true, the effect of these constraints would logically serve to diminish the capacity of the relationship shared by these two countries.

The truth is that Russia and Venezuela find themselves in that very scenario today, as energy prices have dropped dramatically since August 2008.<sup>357</sup> While it is still too early to estimate the damage the drop in energy prices has caused to the relationship, the indications are that it has largely not affected the relationship between the two countries. Interestingly, the parties involved seem to have found new areas of cooperation and increased existing levels in the face of the economic downturn in energy prices.<sup>358</sup> For example, subsequent to the decline in oil prices, official announcements were made detailing potential for Russian use of Venezuelan and Cuban territory for basing strategic bombers.<sup>359</sup> If economics have altered the relationship's equation, the effect cannot yet be discerned.

Any drop in energy prices is more likely to affect what the relationship is able to accomplish and not the goals of the relationship or the reasons for participation. The relationship would undoubtedly be affected by such a phenomenon, but this does not necessarily mean that the relationship would be strained. After all, it was not exclusively economics that created the relationship between Venezuela and Russia, but also their overlapping perception of geopolitical reality. In the same way, this perceived reality will also have a hand in sponsoring the success or failure of the relationship. While monetary concerns may place the relationship on pause, the relationship will not disintegrate unless other foundations change.

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357 F. Liena and L. Jei, "Bumpy Oil Prices Test World's Nerves," chinaview.cn (online), 20 December 2008. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-12/20/content\\_10529881.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-12/20/content_10529881.htm) (accessed 21 March 2009).

358 Walter and Bodzin, Venezuela Courts Russian Investment as Oil Tumbles.

359 "Russia Says Chávez has Offered Temporary Base for Bombers," Wall Street Journal, 14 March 2009. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123703849968430221.html> (accessed 21 March 2009). See also: A. Nicholson, "Russia may Send Strategic Bombers to Cuba, Venezuela," bloomberg.com (online), 14 March 2009. <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=aOEsM2K7T0i8> (accessed 21 March 2009).

Rather than declining energy prices, the relationship is more likely to be affected by the level of commitment of each party. Chávez is clearly and unequivocally committed to his policy of fighting free markets, opposing the United States, and exporting his Bolívarian Revolution.<sup>360</sup> His entire political career is staked upon its perceived success inside of Venezuela, and, to some degree, his ability to make it palatable for some outside of Venezuela.<sup>361</sup> The intensity with which he operates—the same intensity of beliefs that causes him to view the United States as a threat—leaves him little latitude for changing course. Such a change would be disastrous for his political career. The relationship he has built with Russia has arguably become the closest contemporary relationship between a Latin American country and any nation other than the United States. Venezuela's heavy investment in the relationship makes it very difficult to conceive of a better future opportunity for establishment of a U.S. alternative in Latin America. For Venezuela, international perception of the relationship's success is imperative for Chávez's foreign policy success. Just as Venezuela is truly ideologically committed to the Bolívarian movement through the policies of Chávez, it is also committed to the relationship with Russia.

Russia's participation, however, is not as deeply rooted. While there are a number of benefits for Russia, particularly the long term economic prospects and the chance to be viewed as the strongest state-sponsored counter to U.S. hegemony,<sup>362</sup> Russia simply does not need the relationship as badly as does Venezuela. While failure of the relationship would be a setback, it would not deal Russian aspirations as severe a blow as it would the ambitions of Chávez. Further, Russia's support for multipolarity does not extend beyond its relations with smaller nations, nor is it a topic of relations between Russia and the United States. This duality has not gone unnoticed. In fact, Russia has recently been challenged by some of its own partners who infer that Moscow

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360 Trinkunas, The Logic of Venezuelan Foreign Policy during the Chávez Era.

361 Amsterdam, The Russia-Venezuela Partnership: Strategic for Who?

362 Jeremy Morgan, "Venezuela's Chávez Sees an Ally—Russia Sees More Business," Latin American Herald Tribune (online), November 2008.  
<http://www.lah.com/article.asp?ArticleId=321444&CategoryId=10717> (accessed 3 December 2008).

invokes the concept of multipolarity only to advance its own agenda.<sup>363</sup> Given the foreign policy goal of reasserting Russian international strength, it seems unlikely that the international system's polarity lies at the heart of the matter.<sup>364</sup> If this is true, Russia's expressions of commitment to Venezuela's cause and the cause of multipolarity, in general, are more metaphorical than literal.

The difference between the levels of commitment outlined above is the major fault line upon which the relationship may crack. Venezuela, due to its enthusiastic anti-U.S. policies, operates with a zero-sum approach toward the United States.<sup>365</sup> Where the United States is involved, a gain for the United States is perceived as a loss for Venezuela, and vice versa. Russia, on the other hand, does not share the same level of disdain for the United States, and does not perceive the United States to be as threatening.<sup>366</sup> Russia does not believe that a U.S. gain is an unavoidable Russian loss. This difference in perception is one of the weak links of the relationship. While both governments are using the same relationship, their different primary objectives—advancement of an ideology (Venezuela) versus tangible political and economic benefits (Russia)—offer ample potential for the relationship to come undone.

Consider a warming of relations between the United States and Russia. If the United States and Russia began seriously discussing issues such as Central Asia, the U.S. proposed missile defense shield, or nuclear disarmament (something Moscow desperately wants), what would be the impact? Russia would likely work with both Venezuela and the United States in an effort to maximize the gains from relations with both parties. Russia has, in fact, stated its willingness and supposed desire to move closer to the

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363 B. Lo, "Russia and the Multipolar Myth," Centre for European Reform (online), 4 July 2008. <http://centreforeuropeanreform.blogspot.com/2008/07/russia-and-multipolar-myth.html> (accessed 19 March 2009).

364 J. Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

365 M. G. Manwaring, "Latin America's New Security Reality: Irregular Asymmetric Conflict and Hugo Chávez" Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, August 2007, 1-62.

366 M. Schwirtz and E. Barry, "Russian President Welcomes Shift by U.S." *New York Times*, 20 March 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/21/world/europe/21russia.html?ref=world> (accessed 21 March 2009).

United States.<sup>367</sup> The potential effect of “even an insignificant warming” of relations has been already been pondered by Russian media interests.<sup>368</sup> Such an occurrence would seriously undermine the legitimacy of Chávez’s anti-U.S. platform that bolsters his political standing in Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America. If Russia and the United States draw closer, it would be virtually impossible to maintain any credibility in saying that the Russian–Venezuelan relationship is an example of how states work together to reject the United States and free markets. Should this happen, it would expose the bond of multipolarity and resistance to hegemons to be shallow, weak, and based more on ideology than substance. This may be a distinct possibility, as Russia, which was seemingly cautious with respect to the Chávez agenda early on, does desire to engage the United States on major global issues.<sup>369</sup>

Another possible scenario for the unraveling of the relationship could be triggered by Chávez. If the Venezuelan President became aggressive toward his neighbors, perhaps a result of feeling sufficiently liberated by the revolutionary movement to export it elsewhere throughout the region, Russia would almost certainly back off in an effort to distance itself from provocative behavior. Russia has other business interests in Latin America and, given its more pragmatic, dollars and cents approach to international relations, would shy away from doing anything to affect them in a negative way.<sup>370</sup> This scenario may seem unlikely, but it is worth pointing out that Chávez support for the FARC could easily have been interpreted by Colombia in this manner.<sup>371</sup> Also, Venezuela may even feel encouraged to act, buoyed by its feeling (perception) of Russian support. Many claim this sort of behavior is characteristic of Georgian behavior

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367 M. Schwirtz and E. Barry, "Russian President Welcomes Shift by U.S." New York Times, 20 March 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/21/world/europe/21russia.html?ref=world> (accessed 21 March 2009).

368 A. Gabuev and A. Gritskova, "Hugo Chávez Undergoes Conversion//Russia Changes its Priorities in Relations with Venezuela," Kommersant Moscow, 22 July 2008. [http://www.kommersant.com/p914653/r\\_527/Russian-Venezuelan\\_relations\\_/](http://www.kommersant.com/p914653/r_527/Russian-Venezuelan_relations_/) (accessed 16 March 2009).

369 A. Osborn, "Chávez Bolsters Links with Russia," Wall Street Journal, 27 September 2008. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122242592738578617.html> (accessed 16 March 2009). See also: Katz, The Putin-Chávez Partnership.

370 Osborn, Chávez Bolsters Links with Russia.

371 "Colombia's Conflict," Strategic Comments 13, no. 10 (2007), 1-2.

immediately prior to its conflict with Moscow: feeling secure in its relationship with the United States, it discounted the plausibility of a Russian response, causing it to behave more recklessly than it otherwise would have.<sup>372</sup> Both of the above scenarios deal with the notion of either Venezuela or Russia drifting from their status quo positions in the international arena to a new position with which their partner is not comfortable. The relationship between these two countries has indeed benefited from the stability of these countries' respective positions. The more they remain stable in their world views, the more comfortable each becomes with the other.

Still, even if the relationship remains intact, there is no guarantee that it will spawn the long-term benefits both participants are seeking. If the primary goal of the relationship for Chávez and Russia is anything other than strictly business, everything depends on the perception of the observer, the state or the government for whose benefit the relationship is being touted. If Russia is hoping to demonstrate to the United States its lack of appreciation for Washington assisting Georgia during the recent conflict, (which some purport to be the case),<sup>373</sup> the United States must recognize the point being made and take it to heart (something which does not appear to have happened).<sup>374</sup>

Therefore, just because the relationship exists intact does not mean that it will be free from frustration for either side. Given the ideological bent of Chávez's Bolívarian movement, this is more of a danger for Venezuela. For Venezuela, the relationship must produce results with which Chávez can show Latin America the way forward. It cannot stagnate; it must move forward and prove the benefit of the revolution. If Latin American observers do not view the progress made as worthy of reorienting their own systems, the relationship will not have assisted in achieving Chávez's main foreign policy goal. While Chávez does relish poking the United States in the eye while being pragmatic, he needs successful foreign policy. Much of his support inside of Venezuela

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372 M. Lanskoy and G. Areshidze, "Georgia's Year of Turmoil," *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 4 (2008).

373 I. Shapiro, "To Russia with Love: A Plea for Normalcy," *World Policy Journal* 25, no. 4 (2009), 63-73.

374 "U.S. Makes Light of Russian Bomber Parade," presstv.com (online), 16 March 2009. <http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=88820&sectionid=3510203> (accessed 21 March 2009).

is derived from people who believe in the Bolívarian revolution and in a leading role for Venezuela internationally. If Chávez's policies are not able to achieve the revolution's most important foreign policy goal (in other words, his policies fail to accommodate the revolution), voters may begin to look elsewhere for policies that effectively communicate and spread the Bolívarian revolution.

This is undoubtedly part of the reason Venezuela is working the relationship with Russia as hard as it is. Demonstration is only effective if it is completely understood and convincingly effective; such a result depends on the observer's perception. Thus far, the effect of the relationship on the regional strategic balance in Latin America is unclear, even if the geopolitical situation in the region has changed significantly since Chávez assumed control of Venezuela.<sup>375</sup> On the global level, the relationship between Russia and Venezuela does not appear to have altered the global strategic balance. The expectations for the relationship's regional and international effect on this strategic balance are important to consider. If each party's expectations of the relationship are not adequately satisfied, the corresponding level of disappointment and frustration can contribute to questioning the relationship's purpose and value. In this scenario, permissible atrophy is likely to occur.

As a final note, it is important to remember that relations between states are often altered by differences in perception of strength and threat. While one state may be far superior to another in terms of military might, strength alone does not preclude conflict. Most would agree the United States is the strongest state in the world, and need not worry over relationships formed between less powerful countries such as between Russia and Venezuela. However, the decision of Russia and Venezuela to cooperate and build a relationship was arrived at using a calculus unavailable to the United States. If both are as dedicated to a multipolar world as they advertise, and both continue to work in opposition to perceived U.S. hegemony, at some point the United States should expect its

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<sup>375</sup> Castaneda, Latin America's Left Turn.

interests in Latin America, if not elsewhere, to be challenged. While the U.S. government may not perceive the relationship as a threat, this does not preclude Russia or Venezuela from making it so.

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